

MICRO COMPUTER

PRINTOUT

A PLAIN MAN'S GUIDE TO
PERSONAL COMPUTING

Free Inside:-
Instant Intro
to Computing

MAY 1982

95p

275



THE COMPUTER IN YOUR POCKET

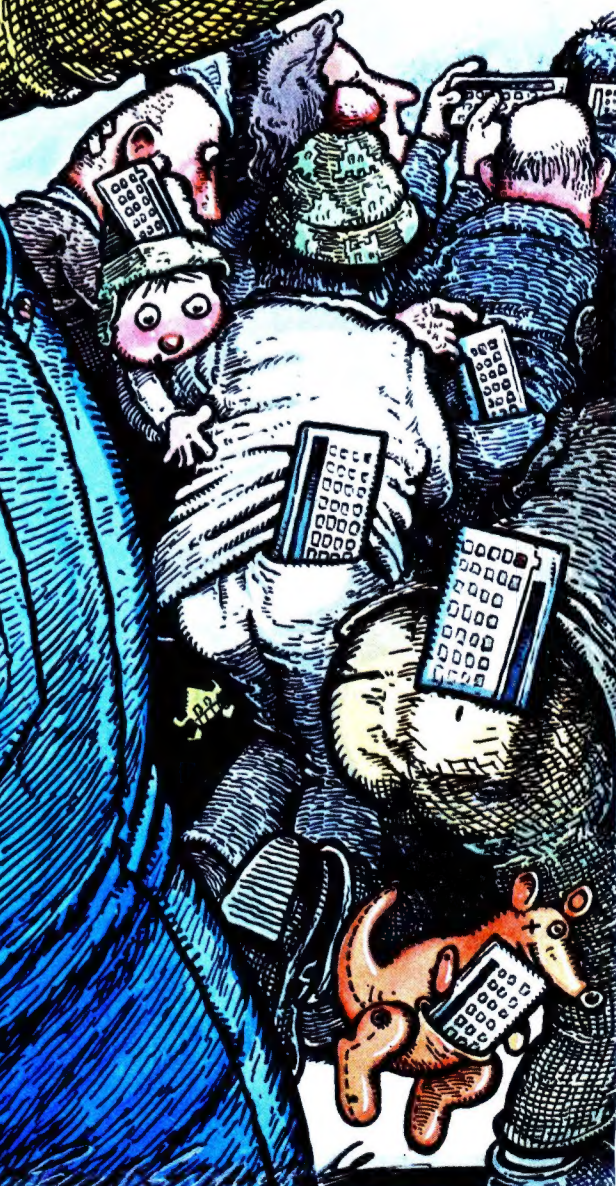
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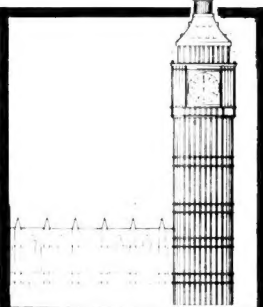
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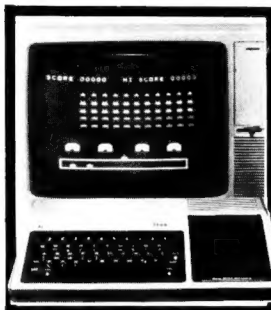


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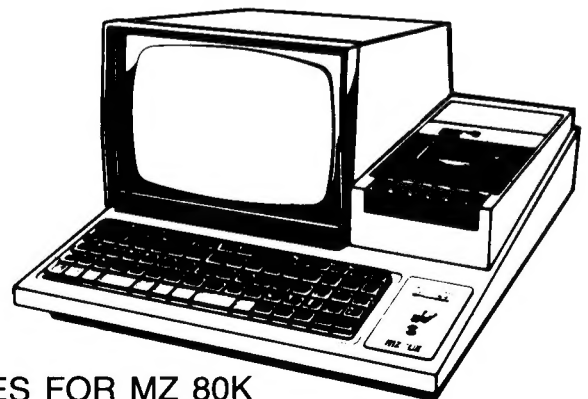
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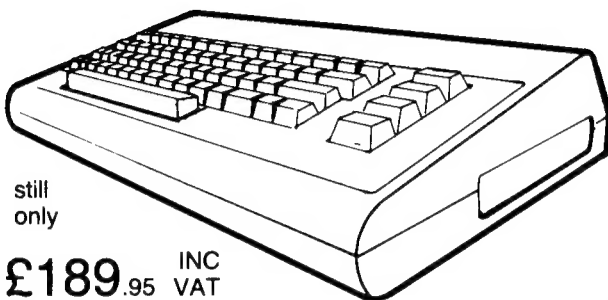
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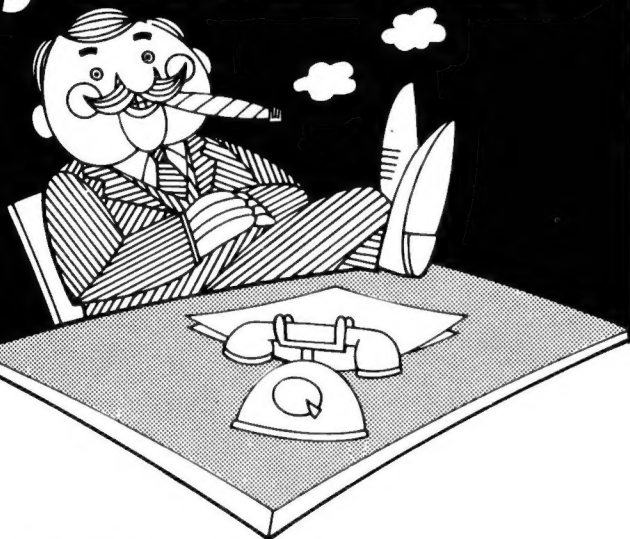
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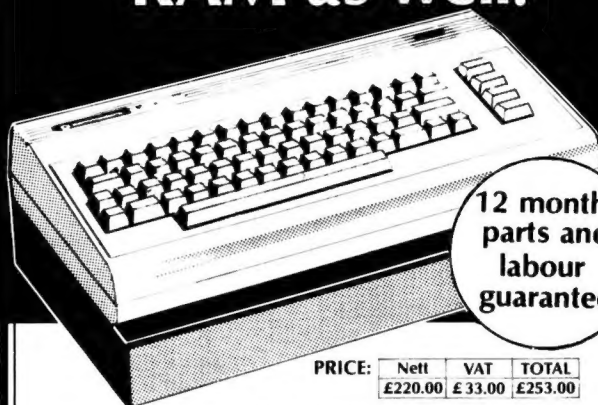
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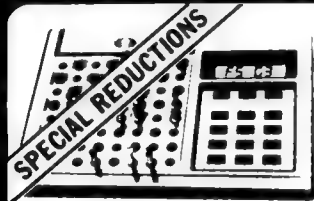
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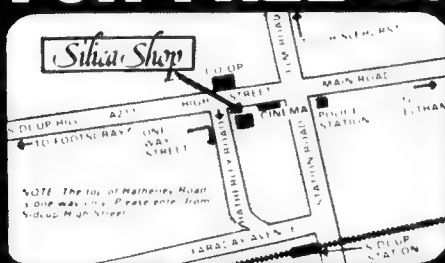
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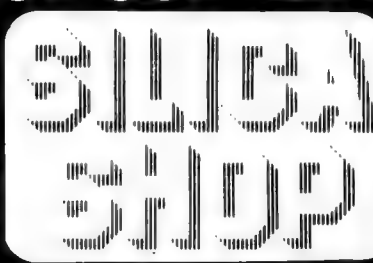
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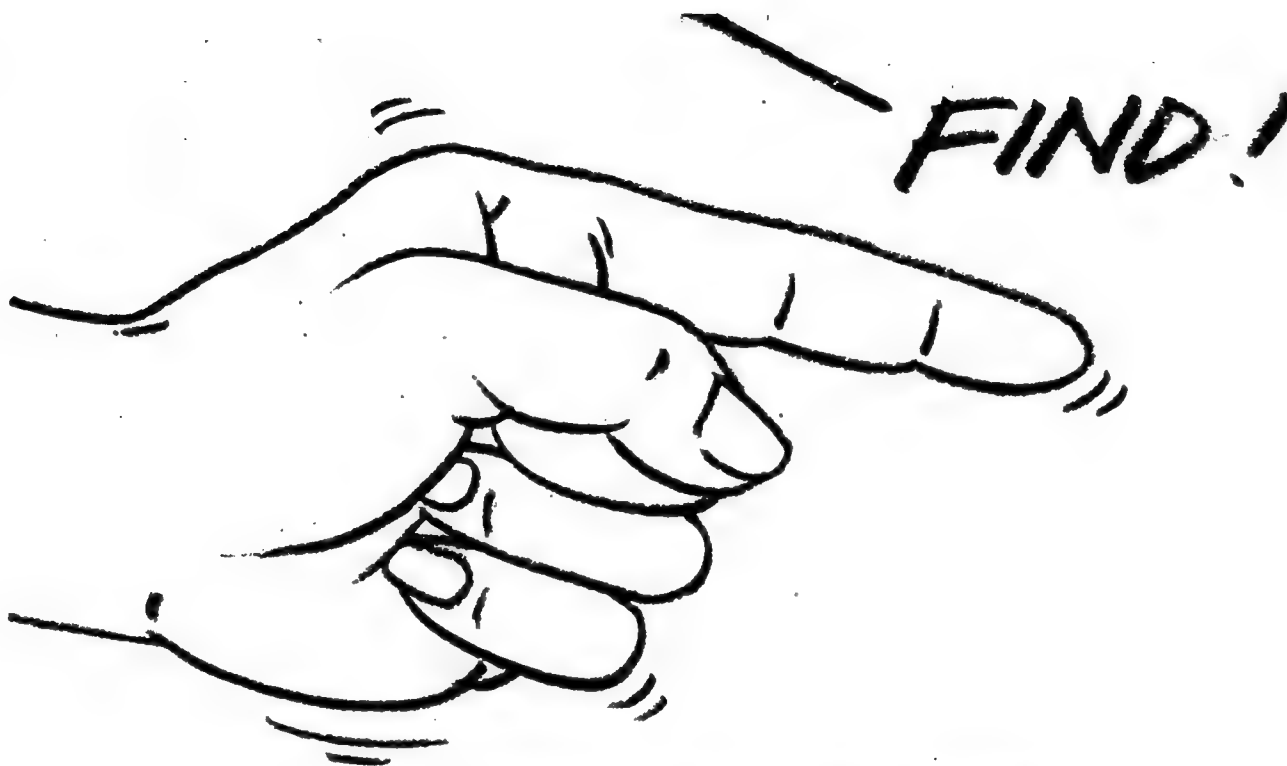
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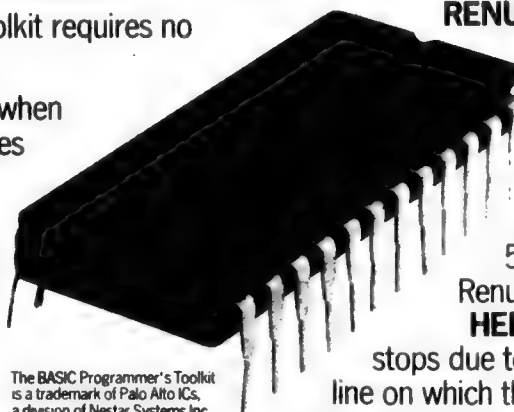
The Toolkit is a set of super aids designed to ease the task of writing and debugging programs on the PET.

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How Toolkit makes your programming easier:

FIND locates and displays the Basic program lines that contain a specified string, variable or keyword. If you were to type FIND A\$, 100-500, your PET's screen would display all lines between line numbers 100 and 500 that contain A\$.

RENUMBER renumbers the entire program currently in your PET. You can instantly change all line numbers and all references to those numbers. For instance, to start the line numbers with 500 instead of 100 just use Renumber 500.

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HOW TO BUY A PUR

Continuing our series of practical advice to first-time buyers, **Spencer Hall** looks at the purchase ledger. His conclusion: unless you spend at least four hours a week processing invoices, don't put this program on your shopping list.

Last month we looked at sales ledgers and discussed the main characteristics of a good sales ledger package. This month we shall be looking at the flip side – the Purchase Ledger.

The basic function of a purchase ledger is to control suppliers and provide an analysis of expenses for production of the final accounts. Tight control of a purchase ledger is not so important as a sales ledger as the onus of credit control is with the supplier and not with the customer. If you forget to pay someone then they will soon remind you – if you forget to invoice a customer, he may well 'forget' also!

Many small companies just keep a file of paid invoices and unpaid invoices, simply transferring the actual invoice from one file to another when it is paid after marking the invoice so that it isn't paid twice. This method saves the tedium of having to maintain a purchase ledger and so cuts down administration costs.

However, the limitations of this method become apparent when you start running into part deliveries or part payments of invoices, and control of unpaid invoices starts to deteriorate. It also makes the production of monthly accounts more time consuming as the unpaid invoices have to be analysed at the end of every accounting period.

Efficiency

So although small businesses may find computerisation of the sales ledger beneficial, the same gains in efficiency may not arise from the purchasing side of the operation. So don't go into a computer shop thinking "I'll have one of each please". If you currently

operate on a cash payments basis you may well do better to let sleeping dogs lie.

If you already maintain a full blown purchase ledger and the nature of your business prevents you from operating on a cash payments analysis basis, then read on...

A good Purchase Ledger program should provide several of the following features – the more you can tick off the better.

1. A list of all suppliers in alphabetical order
2. List of suppliers in account number order
3. Produce remittance advices by selective criteria.
4. Display/print a suppliers current account position.
5. Maintain open item account details.
6. Write out cheques ready for signature (careful on this one).
7. Disallow sing e entry journals
8. Permit discounts for quick payment to be identified.
9. Produce an analysis of all payments for posting to the Trial Balance
10. Produce age analysis of all unpaid invoices.
11. Permit down payments to suppliers.
12. Display/Print control account at any time.
13. Interface to the stock control program (if required).
14. Interface across to the nominal Ledger (if required).
15. Print out day book entries for batch and month to date on request.
16. List suppliers together with turnover figures for year to date.

17. Ability to move some of the narrative about on remittance advices.

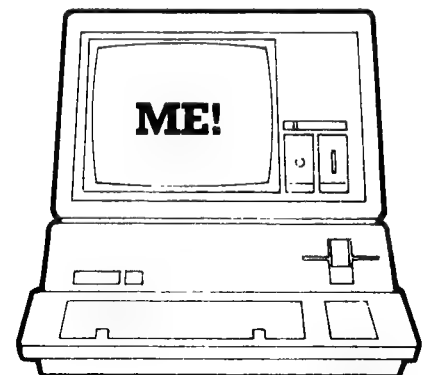
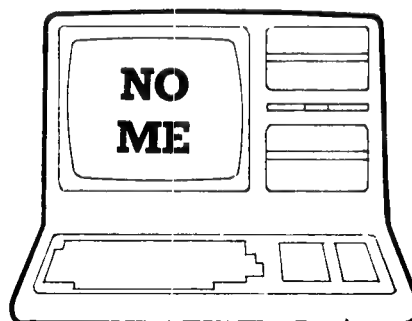
These are some of the main points to look for. Of course the program must be easy to use and each process should be well signposted to guide the user onto the next step. The maximum number of customers will vary according to the capacity of the disks and the computers' RAM. Can you install additional disk drives without program modifications? Can you have more than one screen accessing the same disk drive? These are more esoteric questions which won't concern the small business with 50 invoices per week.

At what sort of level should one consider using a computer to control the purchase ledger? If you spend more than about four to five hours a week just processing invoices and writing up the purchase day book and purchase ledger then you should look at the possibility of a purchase ledger program. Identify those areas which consume the most time. How useful would age analysis be if it was available to you?

Integrated costing

Of course, it may have occurred to you that the purchase ledger should be integrated into a costing system. This sounds like a really great idea in theory except that it gobbles up tons of disk space. It also means your production control and sales have to share the same database which leads to the problem of having the correct disk in the correct disk drive at the right time. Easy if you're a born juggler on an Apple disk drive. Guaranteed to lead to complete confusion if you're a normal fallible human being.

The only successful way in which you can thoroughly integrate a purchase ledger to a costing system to stock control to a sales ledger is – wait for it – Yes, you've guessed – a hard disk drive! That is why there are currently no fully integrated systems which can run on a microcomputer. That operation is still the exclusive preserve of the DEC's and Data Generals of this world.



CHASE LEDGER

The possibility of fraud can be guarded against by implementing the usual management controls such as presenting invoices to the cheque signature at the end of payment, or only entering the invoice onto the ledger when the goods have been received or the services duly authorised.

The most common frauds on a purchase ledger are fictitious suppliers (controlled by periodic reviews of all suppliers with turnover figures), duplicate invoices (checked by day book listing and authorisation of invoices). Other means of combatting fraud include crossing cheques A/C payee only so that the bank will only accept the cheque in the name of the payee's bank account. Also examine returned cheques on the back for any signs of endorsements.

When entering details of suppliers' invoices you should be able to allocate the invoice to more than just purchases and VAT. You should be able to allocate the charge to a variety of accounts as well as identify any discount available for prompt payment.

Disk space

If the program offers open item accounting then cash payments will have to be allocated against specific invoices. Is this achieved relatively painlessly?

You may find it useful to be able to review a suppliers account for the whole year. Usually lack of disk space does not permit this luxury although it can be very useful to be able to examine the movements on a suppliers account over the period of a year.

If you already have a computer then you may find the printer is not suitable for some of the printouts which the program will generate. The age analysis in particular may be more than 80 columns wide which presents certain problems to standard 80 column printers.

Should your business require additional information such as the number of tonnes of fertiliser purchased or other quantity control totals then you will have to enter the realm of bespoke software or have a standard pac-

kage amended.

You may wish to control back orders, i.e. those goods which have been ordered but have not yet been received from the supplier. Some programs may offer this facility but it starts eating into valuable disk capacity it is unlikely that you will find this degree of sophistication on a floppy disk based system.

So to sum up, a purchase ledger is designed to control suppliers and help a business make best use of its creditors as a source of finance. The onus of control lies more with the supplier than with the customer (for chasing up unpaid invoices) but you do need to know those invoices which offer a discount for prompt payment.

Unless you currently spend at least four hours a week processing invoices in one form or another there is little point in attempting to harness the micro chip to assist you. A micro computer system can only really offer the basic fundamentals of a purchase ledger. Due to lack of cheap permanent storage mediums (hard disks still have security problems) a fully integrated purchase ledger encompassing back orders, stock and production costing is at least two years away.

Cautionary tale

So much for Purchase Ledgers and their entourage. I would like to relate a story about the use of microcomputers in the rough, tough world of international business. The story concerns the tale of two British companies (who shall remain nameless to protect the guilty!) one of which has the ubiquitous PET, the other an £18,000 mini computer.

The company with the PET has a word processing program with a high quality printer. It has spent approximately £4,000 on hardware and software and frequently uses it to produce long reports which are subject to last minute revisions and amendments. The quality of printed material produced by the micro has produced extra profits in the region of £6,000 in 1982 alone on one project utilising just the word processing program.

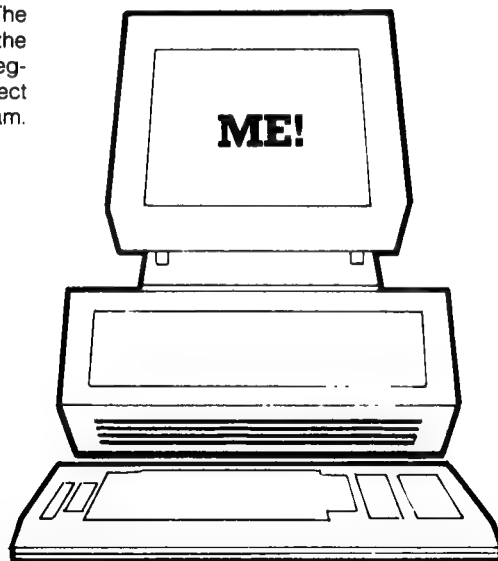
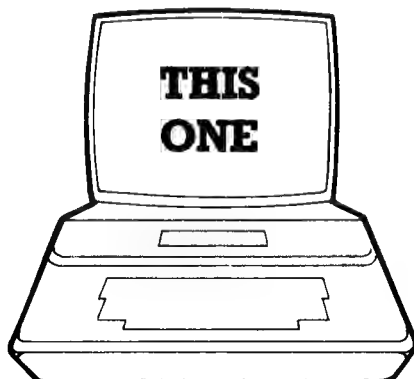
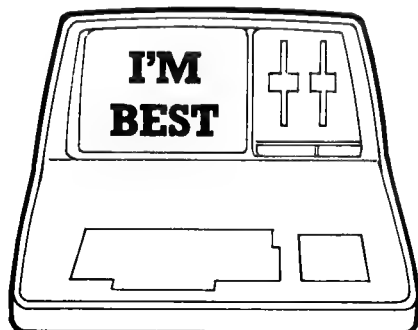
The machine is probably used for about 15 hours a week.

The other company has sales, purchase and payroll on the computer but nothing else. The final accounts were processed on a PET by an accountant in order to reduce the time required to process the final accounts from 8 hours to 1.5 hours. However, when senior management found out what the accountant had done, they were furious and forbade future use of the program and insisted that the accounts were prepared by conventional means. So the poor underpaid accountant had to copy out all the computer printouts in long hand, to fool the management that their request had been complied with. (I wonder why he is underpaid?)

One company is achieving a significant increase in its profitability and has taken on more employees. The other company has made a loss for the last 12 months and continues to do so. There are no prizes for guessing the correct answer.

See you next month.

**Next month:
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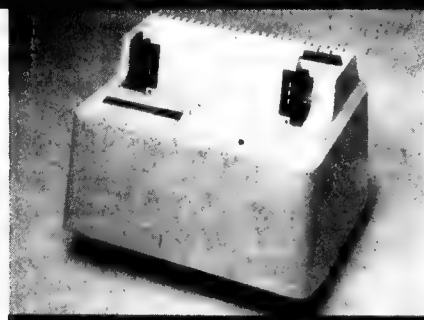
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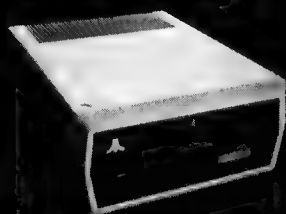


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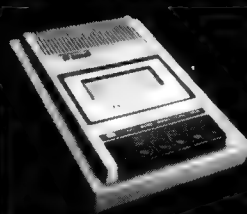
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READ/WRITE

Stimulating Simulation!

I have just been reading the March edition of *MicroComputer Printout* and I was very interested in the article by Humphrey Walwyn, which describes the setting up of games using the computer as a control.

Once again we come back to the same problem of being left to our own devices to re-invent the wheel. When someone has done a lot of work on a particular program for any purpose whatsoever, it does seem a great pity that the information cannot be shared, thus increasing the speed of progress of that interest.

Please can you ask Mr. Walwyn if he could provide a working example of this type of program either directly to me, or to be published in a future edition of your very nice magazine, as the thought of having to spend a great deal of time just getting the first prototype off the ground is enough to stop it being attempted at all. Even if Mr. Walwyn could describe the rules of one specific game it would probably be sufficient to get some of us started, and I personally would be prepared to pay for such information

R.G. Hall,
Water End,
Hemel Hempstead, Herts

We're glad to oblige, Mr Hall, and at no additional cost (though all gratuities gratefully received - used notes only and mark the envelope Editor, please!)

In this case, Humphrey Walwyn has published the listing and program structure for a game called Energiesic - commissioned and designed especially for MicroComputer Printout

Sufficient detail has been included both for you to expand this program, and develop your own simulations

We hope you enjoy playing Energiesic - certainly it has proved addictive in the office, and with a bit of creativity on the board and playing pieces, it leaves behind most commercial games

POKEing it in!

In your recent article on V.D. U advised us 'RAMs' to avoid "too much interfacing" and also "...loading our floppy disk units indiscriminately." Although highly graphic, the description of the transmission of this bug by a simple handshake, baud me.

Never-the-less I decided to play safe and made a resolution to date-a lady P.C. B'cose such women are less volatile and their high-level language is most educational.

I can imagine the pleasant evenings we shall spend:- a quiet byte in a candle lit restaurant, a night at the PROM's, and then back home on the bus for a bit of input/output.

Mike Roesoft,
Romford

Suggest you refer to 'Interlude' program on Apple (reviewed MicroComputer Printout - October '81) for immediate remedy.

Sacred Cow

After seeing the wonderful artwork on the front covers of your magazine each month, I was wondering if there were any posters of some of them, especially the one with the cow (March 82). That face is wonderful

A. Wainwright,
Sheffield



Alas no - though some of them would make rather good posters, wouldn't they? An exhibition of the work of Paul Sample, including the MicroComputer Printout covers is shortly to tour the country, and we will advise dates and venues as they become available

Square-eyed

Please help! I've purchased a VIC 20, but because the cables that came with it are so short, I have to sit uncomfortably close to my TV set. Ideally, I would prefer to sit 10-15 ft away

There are two variables between the TV and the VIC

1. The video cable, connected to an RF modulator

2. Another coaxial cable

Which should I lengthen, and how?

Thanks for your help

D. A. Pinless,
London SE14

p.s. Please make the answer as non-technical as possible!!

In view of the nature of this request we referred this one to our team of boffins who issued the following advice.

"It is essential that the characteristic line impedance is not over-attenuated as this

would give rise to undamped image reflection and electromagnetic losses. High frequency decoupling capacitors between the braid shielding and modulated signal carrier will help, though if in doubt, balance the de-gaussing effect with an appropriate number of picofarads in the ground loop. Raster-scan signals are particular prone to bursts of negative phase demodulation so it is best to perform a fast fourier transformation analysis before finally disconnecting your high-persistence oscilloscope."

Clear? No?

Actually, it is a simple matter of extending the co-axial cable between the TV and the UHF modulator. Use a new bit of cable (from any TV shop) rather than joining two pieces together. The end which plugs into the modulator is an ordinary phono plug - which can be purchased as a HiFi accessory. If your soldering isn't too hot, then most HiFi shops would be happy to make up such a cable

Milk Monitor

Dear Editor,

It is obvious that Inside Trader knows much less about the Apple III than he would like to have you believe. Here is some scoop which may earn you a free drink or two when the two of you next meet at a watering hole: to enter the Apple III monitor simultaneously depress the two keys which bear Apple legends and then turn on the power switch. The device will come up in the monitor with an arrow showing. Naturally the monitor syntax is different from the Apple II but the functions are the same (examine, modify, move memory etc)

Please have a chat with the proofreader for your front cover. A diary is a sort of notebook in which adolescent females tell lies to themselves and to their mothers. Surely the situation depicted on the front of your March issue is a 'dairy'?

Hal W. Hardenbergh,
President,
DTACK GROUNDED,
Santa Ana, California

The Gas Bill Story

In Mike's Muses (March *MicroComputer Printout*) he waxes lyrical about computer 'accuracy'. Here is a simpler 'error' to prove the point:

```
10 LET A = 10*192.6
20 LET B = INT(10*192.6)
30 PRINT A
40 PRINT B
50 PRINT A-B
```

Lines 30 and 40 *both* print 1926. Line 50 does *not* give 0. Try it and see. I have tried this on a ZX81 and a TRS-80.

192.6 has been chosen as it is one of the values which give an error; caused by the way computers hold floating point numbers and the method of extracting integers.

This 'error' was spotted due to a ZX81 per-

READ/ WRITE

The Editor welcomes your letters, but if you require a personal reply please enclose an S.A.E.

son requesting help in a fairly simple program and being totally puzzled by the line 50 effect.

G. Bobler,
ZX-Guaranteed
Unsworth, Bury

How many of you ZX owners knew that one, then? Mike's Muse on computer accuracy was sobering to us all – and indeed, this sort of rounding problem is responsible for many of the apparently insoluble bugs which new programmers encounter.

Listings barred

Surely in the age of Information Technology and the microchip, there must be a better method of transferring listings via computer magazines? Consider the time and frustration taken in laboriously entering a program.

Would it be possible in the near future, as well as printing listings, to encode programs as a series of lines, similar to those used on grocery items? Then with suitable equipment one would just read the program into a computer using a light pen.

P. C. Whale,
Harlow, Essex

A very worthy idea, Mr. Whale – and one that is certainly feasible from a technical viewpoint. The idea has in fact been tried already in some American publications, and Hewlett Packard use such a system for loading programs from instruction manuals into their more advanced programmable calculators.

Two problems raise their ugly heads. First, for programs of the kind of length we publish in the magazine, several pages of Bar Codes would be necessary, because that is not a very compact method of representing characters.

Secondly – the hardware – someone has to produce a bar code reader at a sufficiently low price to persuade at least the majority of our readers to purchase one. And it must run on most microcomputers.

Nevertheless, it is a project we have considered for some time – and should the latter condition be fulfilled, we would be more than pleased to run a pilot scheme.

Program Verse

I just wanted you to see a picture of how I think a computer feels when we program it with all the computer garble one is supposed to program it with! I also thought you might like the little poem:

My PET

IF I SAVE much money
FOR my dog, I'll buy a NEW bone,
But IF he BYTES the OLD Postman again
He'll GOTO another HOME



FOR my PET is a nuisance,
Muddy PRINTS over my CLR HOME,
He POKES around in dustbins,
PEEKING up infections,
RUNning for elections,

What's the NEXT unexpected?

Lucy Lyons (age 13)
London NW3

Hope springs eternal

I wish to announce that Terry Hope is alive and well and sitting in the centre of a hawthorn bush in Hampshire. This simple self-protection should prevent all but the most determined Atari hackers from beating his brains in after a nasty omission from last month's article "What Atari Didn't Tell You".

Unhappily, there was something Terry didn't tell you when he dealt with poking Atari's poly counters. Either that or, as he avers, it got missed at the printers. Personally, I think it's a shame to blame the printers. However, the two-line SOUND and POKE suggestion on page 45 should have contained a second direct SOUND command immediately after the first. Terry says if it's left out the result is dead silence and a fear that Atari is malfunctioning or that one has gone deaf. Inserted, all is well. The missing line was SOUND 0,100,8,8.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go out to the bush with Terry's lunch.

Mrs Elizabeth Hope
Westering, Hampshire

CP/M denounced

Firstly may I thank you for a well informed and impartial magazine.

Having read your April issue with interest, I noted that several times you mentioned the "more popular CP/M".

I feel that I should point out that as none of the 'big three', being PET, Apple and Tandy, offer CP/M as a standard product, and together must represent well in excess of 50% of microcomputers sold, that it must, in fact be more popular not to use CP/M.

The popularity of CP/M is a myth generated by the media, who have more contact with manufacturers than they do with users. Admittedly more manufacturers use CP/M than any other operating system, but there are more computer users who do not use CP/M than those who do.

If an operating system is specifically designed for the machine on which it runs it is almost invariably going to be more efficient for that machine, than a "packaged" operating system.

However, the most important point, as mentioned in many of your articles, is the software. If the software is written properly and is suitable for the job intended, the user should not even be aware of the existence of an operating system, let alone be concerned with which one it is.

I would therefore be grateful if you would place less emphasis on the operating system in articles written for the end user.

This is only of concern to software writers, and they already know the good and bad points of operating systems.

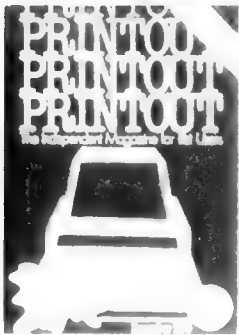
D.G. West,
Chess Consultancies Ltd.,
Cheetham Hill,
Manchester M8

Well stated, Mr West. We certainly agree that an operating system or application package written for one specific machine will be far more efficient and probably more user-friendly than a packaged one.

CP/M has in some ways become an excuse for new hardware manufacturers not providing software support for their machines. "It runs CP/M" they say "so it has access to a huge library of applications software." What they don't say is that many of the best business packages are written not for CP/M but for one specific machine such as the PET, Apple or Tandy.

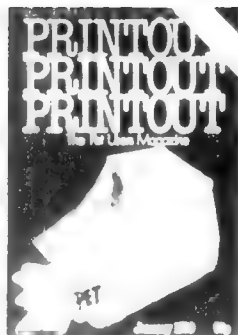
In any event, we predict that CP/M will start to lose its hold with the arrival of newer operating systems. What is called for is greater compatibility between hardware manufacturers, not a blanket operating system that works on the lowest common denominator.





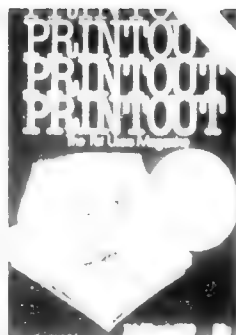
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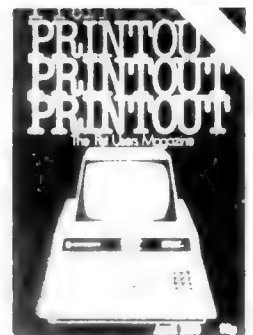
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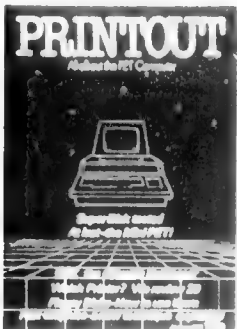
Feb/March 1980

Speech Synthesis on PET - HitchHiker's Guide to PET - Review - Commodore 3050 Disk Drive evaluated - PET Games report - New Approach to Subroutines - Tokens in Basic - Petaid review - Analogue to Digital devices - The PET Keyboard



April 1980

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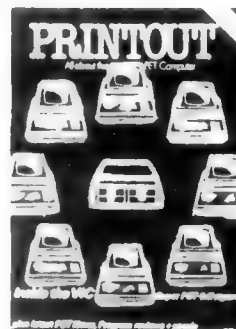
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What will VIC be like? - VisiCalc and how to use it - Easier disk handling with Turnkey ROMs - All you need to know about communications - Reports on eight communications products - Colour for the PET - Free - a two line word processing program - Dipping into machine code - Index to Vol 1 - The Assembler Chip - does it work?



April 1981

What Commodore didn't tell you about the Super PET - Guide to Business Software - How to buy a computer - All you need to know about multi user systems - MUPET profile - Report on the Multi-PET System - How to use cassette files - VIC in Vegas - The Great Computer Quiz - Inside the VIC - Can a Computer Teach you to Type? - PROKIT programming aid for business users - LIST program for non-PET printers



May 1981

Why VIC is the Best Home Computer yet - How to Protect Programs against Piracy - Screen Scratchpad program listing - Interfaces Explained - Critical Guide to Computer Books - Animating PET (with program listing) - My First Four Days with VIC - Pilot language Explained - How to use subroutines - plus software reviews



August 1981

Looking for Lucan, our program predicts whereabouts of missing Ear - Software Awards Program - The best for different micros - How to choose a Cheap Computer - Checkmate! Two top chess programs battle it out - Financial Modelling on Micros - Prestel on PET - How to write programs others can understand - Bernard Levin tests the Bionic Briefcase - How to Buy a Printer - Sorts Explained - PET programming problems solved - How BASIC Works



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October 1981

Computers That Talk - Which Computer Should I Buy? - The Naughtiest Program in the World - IBM's Personal Computer - Beginners Guide to Personal Computing - What is CP/M? - How the KGB Steal Chips - Graphics for Sinclair ZX-81 - Anatomy of a Microcomputer - Daisywheel Dual Computer Psychiatrist program listing



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Personal Electronic Transactions* : Formatting numbers - Hardware Repeat key : review - High Resolution Graphics : Review and User Report - CompuThink 800K disk drive : test - The Game of LIFE - PET User Groups - Educational Software reviewed

June 1980

PET Show Guide - 8050 SuperPET : Full evaluation - Book review* - Fantasy Simulations reviewed - Interview with Commodore's founder - PET Tokens for text - Hanover Fair Report - PRINT USING Function for PET : listing

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July 1981

Could a Micro Have Caught the Ripper? Video Games vs. Computer Games - Beginners Guide to Word processing - What the Salesman won't Tell You - Assembler for Beginners - Cipher Generator program listing - The Truth About BASIC Compilers for PET - 10 Amazing Facts About Micros - Computers in Schools: Where the Government got it wrong - How BASIC Works II - The Great Computer Race: game



December 1981

The Top Ten Micros - Micro-computer Crime - Investigation Do Businesses need 16-Bits? - Converting BASIC to run on your machine - The Ten most asked Beginners Questions - Bluff Your Way into Computing! - Plug-ins for Apple and Sinclair - Is VIC worth the wait? - PET Detective Game - Useful Data Structures - The micro controlled kitchen



January 1982

All about Colour Graphics - What are Networks? - How to buy a Business System - Working from home with a micro - D.I.Y. Business programming - Converting BASIC programs - PET Music - Apple Word Processing - Life game for Sinclair - Chessboard graphics on VIC - Features on Osborne 1 and Sirius 1.

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April 1982

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Telex via Computer

'The Medium is the Message', as Marshall MacLuhan remarked in his incomprehensible 1964 opus *'Understanding Media'*. But last week this questionable thesis was vindicated – as our production manager, Wendy, struggled to restore a news story into something resembling English.

The article – on communications needless to say – had been telexed to our office, retyped and then keyed afresh into the typesetting machine. The result, as you would expect, was gibberish.

Wouldn't it be nice, we thought, not for the first time, if the whole thing could be automated. And now, fellow sufferers, it can. For Encotel Systems have developed the necessary software to automate the sending of telex messages by microcomputer.

Here's how it works. The computer is linked via an RS232 port to the telex interface unit which is connected directly to the ordinary telex network. Once the software has been loaded, messages can be sent and received *in the background*, while you carry on with your normal computing tasks.

Encotel have the telex system up and running on the Intertec Superbrain, but will shortly have versions for other CP/M machines. British Telecom have tested it and given full BT approval.

The interesting thing from our point of view is that standard CP/M text files, such as those created by word processing software, can now be sent as telex messages.

Telex messages are of course all in capitals, but the system carries out the necessary ASCII to Baudot data conversions, compensating where necessary for lower case letters. Further details can be had from Bob Jones at Encotel Systems, 530-538 Purley Way, Croydon, Surrey.

Getting stories back from our foreign correspondents in time for copydate has provided more than a few headaches in the past, as the Editor's depleted stock of Aspro's bears witness. This month former *Times* correspondent Michael Frenchman, will be taking delivery of the Osborne 1 briefcase computer he bought after reviewing it in *The Thunderer*. He plans to transmit copy for future articles to us via the international telephone network using an acoustic coupler and the *Microlink* program.

Perhaps the first British journalist to file stories in this way was another of our contributors, Guy Kewney, who managed to scoop competing trade weeklies with a report from this year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. He too used the Osborne 1 because of its portability. Details on how you can communicate from Osborne Computers at 38 Tanners Drive, Blakelands North, Milton Keynes.

GOTO JAIL

Go To Jail – Do Not Pass Go – Do Not Collect £200. Yes, it is *Monopoly*, the classic property speculation game in which Whitehall and Park Lane change hands for £375 a piece and you can pick up a railway station for just £200.

Derek Tidman of Work Force has adapted it to run on Sinclair ZX-81s equipped with 16K of RAM.

Up to six players can compete, with the computer acting as board, rule-book, umpire, dice thrower, accountant and rent collector. The player is guided through the game by a menu indicating whose turn it is and what property and cash they hold.

The game is played using such commands as BUY, SELL, MORTGAGE, BUILD and so on. As *Monopoly* games frequently turn into marathons, Derek has sensibly included a routine to SAVE the current game on tape.

ZX81 *Monopoly* costs £8 from him at 140 Wilsden Avenue, Luton. Somewhat cheaper than the original!

Now if this darn computer would just throw me a double I could get out of JAIL and rejoin the game....

Curse of the Hotline

Selwyn Ward is a man who never touches wood, and breaks mirrors without a second thought. He must be, because he has just asked me to publicise his new journal *Computer Games Review*.

Starting with the June issue the £10 a year bi-monthly will

concentrate on reviews of games programs. Ward's address is 10 Star Lane, St. Mary Cray, Kent.

Bearing in mind the kami-kaze style record of organs previously publicised on this page, I give it three months. At the outside. Touch wood.



Anti-glare filters are hardly a new idea, but the Homalite low reflectance, contrast enhancement screens must be the Rolls Royce of filters.

The idea of course is to cut down eyestrain and fatigue, or in my case illegibility – my computer screen being cunningly positioned to reflect whatever sun there is right into my eyes.

SGL, who make the Homalite filter will actually sell you one that is colour matched to the phosphor of your screen. The bad news is that they are at 76 Euclid Avenue, Hadonfield, New Jersey 08033, once uncharitably described as the armpit of the USA.

Apple Trainers

Everyone has their favourite software horror story. Mine concerns the man who bought a Payroll package that worked perfectly, but for one thing: it used American tax codes and required all salaries to be in dollars!

Apple have had a truly original idea that could make such disappointments a thing of the

past. Called *Trainer Packs*, they contain the kernal of such programs as *VisiCalc III* and *Applewriter III*. For £18 you get the documentation and a diskette which allows you to do a sample run of the real program in the privacy of your own home. All in all, a considerable improvement on the usual five-minute high pressure demo you might be treated to in the store – if you are lucky.

As you will have gathered, the Trainer packs are for Apple III. Other titles available in the series are *Mail List* and *Business Graphics*, with more to follow.

Can you claim the cost back if you subsequently buy the real thing? "Um-Err" said Apple when I enquired. So it can't do any harm to ask.

Talking of Apple software, the company are about to publish a useful directory. I counted 17 'approved' programs for Apple III. The latest of these include a communications package called *Access III*, the *Script III* text editor for Pascal text, and a *Pascal Utilities Library*. The directory is free.





Shoot the Messenger

I have bad news for the promoters of the forthcoming *Computer Controlled Video Workshop*. The video disk is about to be pronounced Dead On Arrival.

Which is a pity, since video disks, with their ability to store hundreds of thousands of frames of information on a single low-cost platter, offer a far more cost-effective means of storing data than yer actual Winchester—let alone floppy—disks.

It is fully seven years since the first video disk player was announced, and RCA, Philips and sundry Japanese megaliths have been selling them in the States since 1977. Without, it must be admitted, a great deal of success.

In fact it was the video disk manufacturers who first learned to appreciate that it is software that sells hardware, a lesson lately re-discovered by micro-men.

The fact that video disks can't record didn't help much, either.

The final nail in the video disk coffin is the agreement of a single standard for low-cost miniature

video tape cassettes, upon which the signatures of Sony, Philips, and the other big video names is barely dry.

Friends in low places tell me that this has already led to money earmarked for the development of the video disk being diverted to said low-cost miniature video cassette recorder projects. Without the economies of scale offered by a consumer mass market the video disk looks as if it will become a rather more expensive piece of kit than it is at present.

All this has happened so recently that the brake has yet to be applied to the development of computer interfaces to video disks. Indeed, an enterprising American company is already offering a video disk storage device linked to an Apple. Delegates to the *Computer Controlled Video Workshops* (admission £275!) will be able to play with it on May 18th and 19th and June 17th and 18th. Details from 108 Kew Road, Richmond, Surrey.

The squeeze is on

My problem with floppy disk systems is that I can never get enough on them. Though different types of floppy disk vary in capacity by a factor of up to 10, sooner or later one finds oneself swapping disks around like playing cards for lack of space.

Which is why computer scientists all over the world have been researching into *Data*

Compression—ways of squeezing more information into the same number of bytes. The problem to date has been that the best methods offer an improvement of only about 20%, and are very slow both at encoding the data into its compressed form and subsequently decoding it again.

Enter Dr. Dennis Andrews;



he's a sort of cross between neurobiologist and engineer (in case the photograph hasn't already given that away) from the University of Keele. He's come up with a program called E40 which claims to reduce text files down to about 40% of their original size—and in not much more time than it takes to make a copy of the file!

Maddeningly he won't tell me how it's done. Even my best set of trick questions (guaranteed to extract a full confession from the most tight-lipped company spokesman) reveal only that E40 is based on 'statistical properties of English'. 'Even the University's computing department don't believe it's possible', chortles the good doctor.

The utility requires no knowledge of what is in the file to compress it, since it can cope with all 256 possible ASCII character codes—including the special symbols used for embedded controls in word processing.

Though primarily designed for normal English prose, E40 apparently copes with Olde English Poetry, technical manuals

and even straight numerical data. We have yet to try it out on Tommy's 'English'.

E40 was developed with mainframes, minis and micros in mind, and in the latter case is now available for any machine that will run CP/M. A 6502 version is apparently 'nearly finished', aimed at the Apple II, III and (ultimately) PET.

E40 works as a utility in RAM (occupying around 9K) and you simply compress or expand any file on the disk. This rules out random access files—where you only use part of a file at once. Andrews hopes that several word processing suppliers will link their products to E40—thereby making the whole process transparent to the user.

E40 is available for £100 + VAT (inc. P&P) according to the good doctor, or £99.95 + VAT if you believe his marketing advisors. You can get it from Keele Codes Ltd., University of Keele, Keele, Staffs. ST5 5BG.

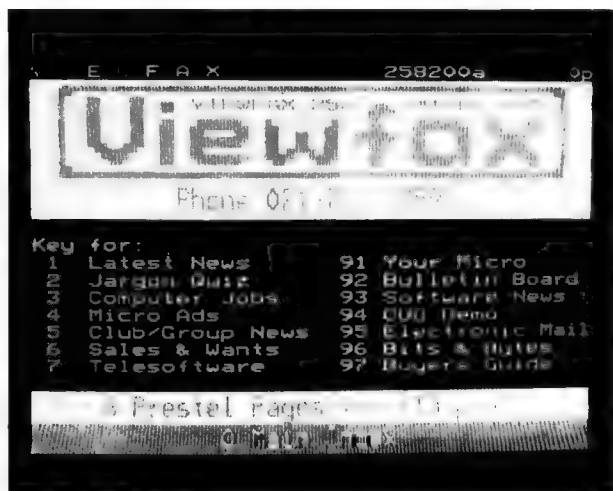
Angry Letter

'Angry of East Grinstead' has taken me to task for writing about the Olivetti mini-Winchester disk last month. It works with neither his PET, Apple nor, he says, any other proprietary system.

Stand easy, 'Angry'; I have the answer. The boffins at Small Systems Engineering are even now putting the finishing touches on a mini-Winchester disk system that will plug directly into your PET, giving up to 12 megabytes of hard disk storage under either the PET Disk Operating System, or CP/M. Or both!

What's more, under CP/M, this new MW1000 system will run *without* the PET if any standard terminal is plugged into the built-in RS232 serial port. This, as the Small Boffin is not slow to point out, amounts to a very economical, stand-alone Z-80 based CP/M computer with 60K of RAM and a hard disk.

£3360 is the cost of the 12 megabyte system, although there is a 3Mb version for a more modest £2538 + VAT. The Small Systems boffins reside at 2-4 Canfield Place, London N.W.6. Tel: 01-328 7145.



I think I had better tell you about these people, because single handedly they have convinced me to do something that a mega pound advertising campaign from British Telecom failed to do—and that's to become a Prestel subscriber.

Folks in question are Messrs. Reid and Henry who run a free daily electronic magazine all about micros, called Viewfax 258. Apart from news, there is also free software to download. It is accessible to 15,000 odd subscribers to Prestel.

Obviously the money has to come from somewhere, and Viewfax raise it by selling pages at £15 a time to computer manufacturers and dealers to run their own newsletters, bulletin boards, product directories and dealer lists.

One major advantage Viewfax enjoys over other bulletin boards is that it is available 24 hours a day at local call rates. Prestel information is also sent at four times the speed of most bulletin board systems.

The magazine has allocated a number of pages to computer clubs which they can edit themselves free of charge. Response frames are provided for electronic mail and the ordering of products and services. Micro owners are also offered free space in a 'Sales & Wants' section.

You can reach Viewfax 258 by telephoning 021-705 0258 or use Prestel mailbox 021704115 if you are already on the system.

New generation of PETs, VICs coming

EXCLUSIVE: Commodore are about to announce not one but five completely new computers.

They range from an intriguing sub £100 computer/music synthesiser/video game machine, to a powerful new business computer with 256K of RAM.

Commodore plan to unveil the new range – which will eventually kill off the PET – at the Hanover Trade Fair in late April.

Here is a model by model breakdown with the (hitherto) confidential details of each machine:

THE ULTIMAX is a low-cost combined computer, sound synthesiser and colour video game machine. Like the current VIC-20, it normally plugs into a TV screen, but for special high resolution effects it can be used with a colour monitor.

The *Ultimax* accepts plug-in cartridges, but *not* the same ones as the VIC-20. A variety of video game cartridges will be available, as will a sound synthesiser with 'piano' overlay for the membrane keyboard.

To compute, a BASIC cartridge must be slotted in. This is not the 'standard' PET/VIC/Microsoft BASIC, but a subset of it minus trig. functions and dimensioned arrays.

Did I tell you that the colour graphics are superb? Well they are, with up to 16 different colours on screen at any one time, and high resolution of 320 x 200 pixels (picture elements or points) built-in.

The designers have also adapted the 'sprite' graphics techniques developed at MIT for the Logo language. A sprite is a single character that you create on a 24 x 21 matrix, which can then be moved around the screen independently of anything else. It might be a Space Invader, a transistor or whatever you choose.

In fact, you can have up to 256 such sprites and in a variety of colours. They can pass over or under each other on the screen, or simply collide. Up to eight sprites may be on any one line, so large 3D effects can be created. Because screen images can be moved pixel by pixel, both horizontal and vertical scrolling is possible.

Whereas on the VIC-20 both audio and video output are controlled by the VIC chip, on the *Ultimax* the VIC chip has been split into a 6566 chip to handle the more complex video display, and a 6581 SID sound synthesiser. A variety of sounds can be generated, making it possible to simulate

different instruments in eight voices.

The CPU is a 6510, essentially an upgrade of the PET's trusty 6502 chip. It uses the same machine codes but has an additional 8-bit output port that is bit-by-bit programmable. This allows more memory to be accessed than on the 6502, but without recourse to memory management routines.

The *Ultimax* uses the standard Commodore cassette system for storage, and comes with 1K of screen RAM, 1K of colour RAM and 1K of user memory. The BASIC cartridge includes an additional 2.5K of RAM.

Probable price: £99 inc. VAT, but with CBM marketer John Baxter covetously eyeing the lucrative Sinclair market, he might persuade Big Bob Gleadow to let him sell it for less.

Target date for release is September, but you know about Commodore and their release dates

Much heralded the **VIC-40**



leaves most prognosticators with egg on face. Contrary to prediction it has more in common with the *Ultimax* than the current VIC-20 model. It will, for example, accept *Ultimax* cartridges, but not VIC-20 ones – a further example of lack of long range planning at CBM.

It looks as if there will be two models, one priced at about £300 with 16K of RAM, and a 64K version at around the £500 mark. The latter will, as with the PET, have 32K of RAM accessible by the user from BASIC. The remainder up to 52K will be available for languages etc.

The VIC-40 will share the same ROMs as the existing VIC-20, so there shouldn't be any compatibility problems there. In fact it will be possible to redefine the memory map, so conversion and tailoring of PET and VIC software should be straight

forward.

It will be possible to plug more accessories in without the need for multiplexer: four games paddles, two joysticks or two light pens.

Case and keyboard will be the same as the VIC-20.

According to the Commodore leaks department, there are also plans for a direct connect modem, Z-80 softcard, Extended BASIC ROM and Extended Machine Code cartridges, the latter necessitated by the lack of a built-in machine code monitor.

Release date is currently scheduled for the end of the year.

The **Commodore 64** looks like a replacement for the 4000 series PETs, from where we stand. However, Commodore are likely to continue making the latter for as long as there is a demand.

Smart new ergonomic styling resembles a rounded off PET, with detachable keyboard and tilt-and-swivel screen. The new keyboard seemed a considerable

Disk drives will be built into the base. These will run off DMA so they should be very fast.

The CPU is a 6509 (no blood relation of the 6809) with bank switching between the 16K RAM banks. Screen format is 80 columns by 25 lines with a built-in high resolution graphics capability (but will it be implemented?) There is also a 24 hour clock with programmable alarm, so no doubt someone will offer a battery back up to keep it going when the power is off.

Commodore have at last provided both RS232 and IEEE-488 interfaces onboard. Judging by the preliminary spec, wot I have had sight of, it looks like the full, debugged IEEE-488 – at long last!

Taking the 256K version, 64K of memory will be allocated to the operating system, probably to allow space for additional processors. It is likely there will be slots for Z-80, 6809 and 8080 processors. Hints of a revolutionary new 'universal' computer capable of running "any" software have been dropped by Commodore bigwigs recently. Despite enthusiastic reporting in the national press, we remain unconvinced; the Z-80 softbox for the PET is hardly a new item, and the CBM micro mainframe already offers dual processors.

Returning, reluctantly, to the *CBM 256* memory map, we find 128K available for softloaded languages and operating systems (such as CP/M?), and additional space for expansion ROMs.

It is also worth noting that the memory will be capable of expansion to 512K with an external box.

On the software side we find that the language subset of the 6509 is almost identical to the well-tried 6502, so although there is no direct compatibility with software for the 8000 series PETs (aagh!), conversion "will be easy". Their words, not mind.

Rather sensibly Commodore have chosen to get their 'Approved Products' suppliers involved before, rather than after, the launch of the new machine. At a confidential briefing session, into which I managed to insinuate myself, one of the software publishers asked the obvious question: 'With all this RAM space and memory mapping, will character sets be definable?' Answer: 'That's why we invited you here today'.... Proving beyond doubt that the Commodore still believes that Software sells

Politics

more consecutive votes on detailed amendments to a bill, an MP can spend three hours doing nothing whatsoever except standing in a queue.

It should be the easiest thing in the world to get this time-wasting process onto a computer so that an MP can sit at his desk or on the green leather benches and not only punch in "Aye" or "No" to the specific question in hand, but tackle such problems as "If Amendment 24 is passed, should we then drop Amendment 25?" or, "If you are against the Bill, would you switch to supporting it if we threw in Amendment 39?"

There's a lot of resistance to this idea, partly because MPs are probably the most tradition-minded people in the country, partly because previous experience elsewhere has been so very discouraging.

Euro glitch

Take the splendid new electronic voting system in the European Parliament building in Strasbourg. It was built by the Italians (like those indicator boards at stations which tell you that the 10.15 train will be going to QWXPBVJW, calling at YTLMFZ) and the plan was that it would flash up the result of each vote within half a second of the last legislator making up his mind. To stop anyone fraudulently casting votes for people who were absent, each MEP (or Member of the European Parliament) was given his own magnetic card. He or she slotted it into the console on the desk, punched 'Yes' or 'No' (or 'Ja' or 'Nein' or whatever) and Bob was your uncle.

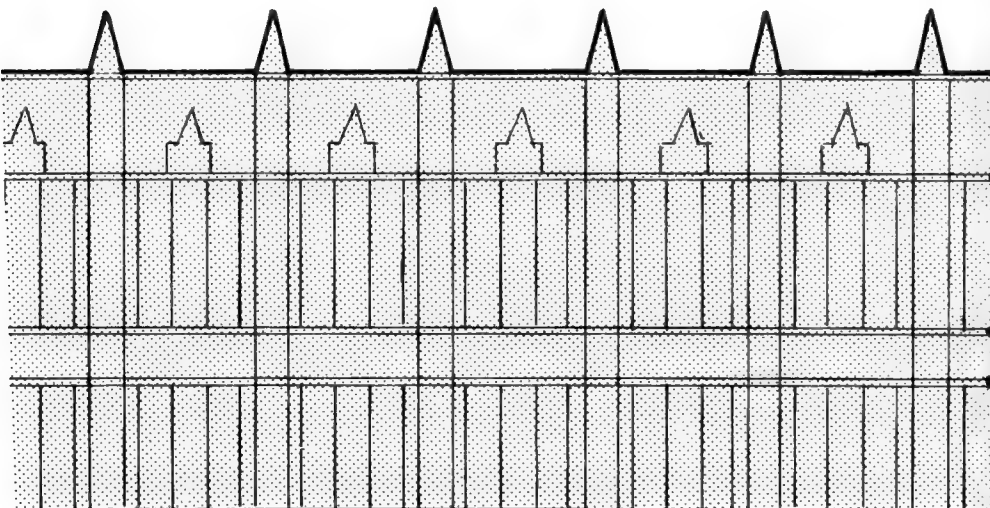
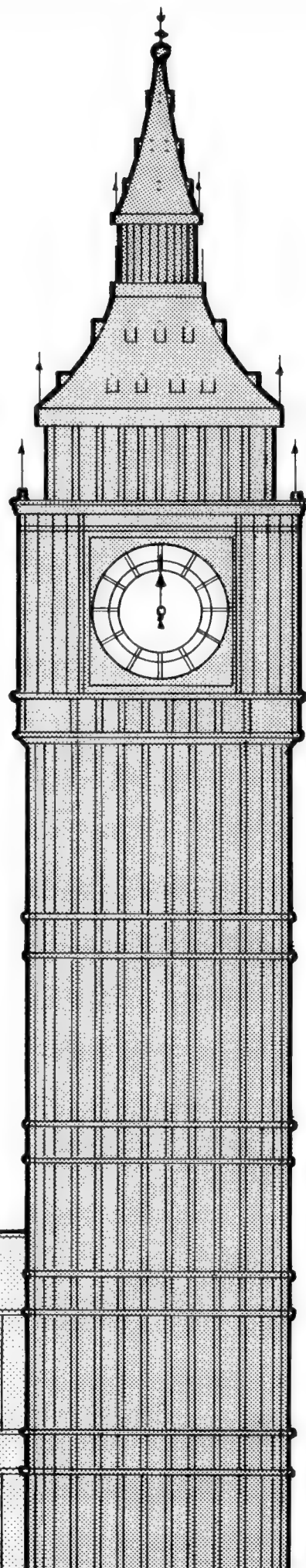
Except that it never actually worked.

Static electricity generated by the carpets (or so they thought; it might have been rubber soles) so confused the computer that it

flashed up a series of random numbers. Votes would have to be re-taken, and a completely different series of numbers appeared. Even when the system had been de-bugged, the losing side only had to claim that the result was unreliable and the vote ought to be taken again – for instance after lunch, when a few of their supporters had got back. And, it appeared, some MEPs were (quite disgracefully) lending their magnetic cards to their friends to vote on their behalf. When a vote was called, a few were dashing from seat to seat, popping in the cards, voting as freely and frequently as an Irish corpse.

So computerisation may not come to Westminster yet. But there's no reason on earth why it shouldn't be used by the political parties in the country – especially by the SDP. The Social Democrats have pledged to consult their membership on more or less every important topic. This is all very well. But there really is little point in asking someone a single question: "Should we ban the bomb?" for instance. "Should we ban the bomb even if the Russians invade Poland?" might be a bit more useful. "Should we ban the bomb even if the Russians invade Poland and it turns out that the Trident missile system is going to cost more than the predicted £5 billions. Or £10 billions. Or £1 trillion?"

For eons now the electors have been asked, in effect, one simple question: do you vote Tory or Labour? And their answer, which often depends on such vague consideration like 'it's time to give the other lot a chance' has been taken by politicians as the excuse to do exactly as they please with the British economy, the country's defence, the educational system, the health service and the problems facing the nation's paperclip industry. It's possible for a Government to go



against the wishes of 90 per cent of the country's population while behaving in a perfectly legitimate and democratic fashion.

Parliamentary Competition

So what we need is a computer program to get around this problem, and we invite readers to send in their suggestions. The program should be devised to work out, in as much detail as possible, the voters' views on one particular topic – defence, taxation, fox-hunting, abortion, the paperclip industry – you name it.

It should be 'menu-driven' – that is to say, offering the voter a series of choices at every stage. It should attempt to find out not only whether the voter is 'for' or 'against' a particular policy, but whether he would be for or against it under a wide variety of different circumstances which might crop up. It should contain as little inbuilt bias as possible – i.e. no questions on the lines of 'would you still be against the Bomb if it meant that hordes of yellow Chinese would overrun us the day after we got rid of it?' You must assume that the actual arguing will be done on TV and in the newspapers during the weeks leading up to the vote. Your job is not to steer people in

one direction or another, but to work out precisely what conclusions they have already reached.

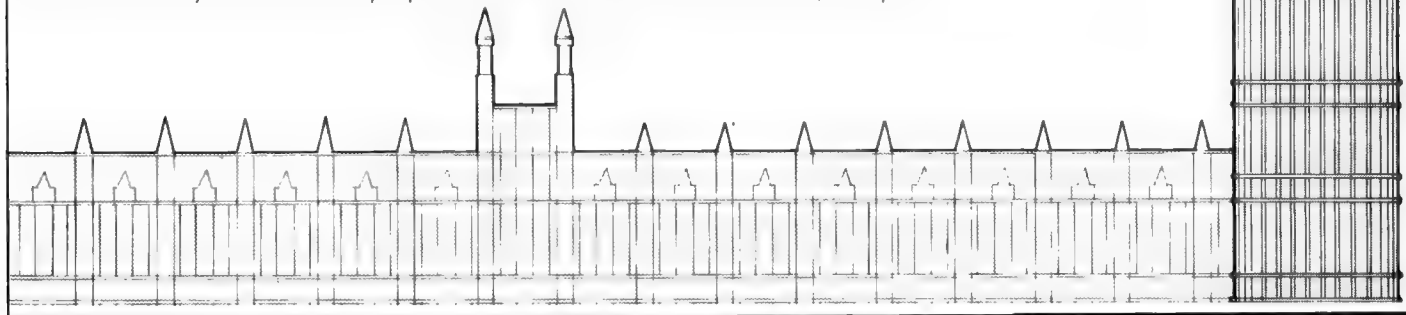
If you have enough memory in your micro, it would be very useful indeed to know how strongly each voter felt about the issue. For example, most opinion polls indicate that the British people think that the Army ought to withdraw from Northern Ireland. Yet because most voters don't feel passionately either way, the Government is under no real pressure to bring them home.

The program ought also to keep a count of the decisions taken by each voter. In other words, it should be easy for the operator to say '62 per cent are against caning in schools, but 73% would be in favour if teachers said it was essential for discipline. Even in these circumstances 84 per cent said it should never be used on girls....' etc.

The program should be as friendly in tone as possible. After all, lots of people are still apprehensive when faced with a keyboard and a video screen, and they have votes too. Probably better not to have the computer address the elector by name, since he might suspect that his views would be recorded somewhere. On the other hand, the ques-

tions should be patiently spelled out and the voters should know that they have as long as they like to answer.

Good luck. The winner will have his or her program printed in *MicroComputer Printout* and will get a luxury parliamentary delegation for two to the West Indies, or Westminster, whichever is the nearer.



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HARDWARE

HOW IT

How does your computer actually work? What are all those small, black chips surrounding the microprocessor and what are they for? **Chris Preston** explains the fundamentals of hardware design in terms the complete beginner can understand.

A quick scan of the computer section of your local bookshop will turn up a vast number of books dealing with programming at all levels. There are not too many books describing hardware which are aimed at a beginner. Even *MicroComputer Printout* is not renowned for its coverage of the subject. This short series of articles aims to put right this lamentable state of affairs. In order to restrict ourselves a little bit though, we will only look at *digital* hardware, which after all is the meat of the computer. All machines do have some *analogue* circuitry to drive the screen and cassette or disk drives. The difference is that in digital circuitry, all the information is carried either as 1's or 0's, analogue information is like sound information: the level of the signal varies continuously between limits.

To most home computer users, what happens under the lid of their machine is a complete mystery. Yet contrary to popular opinion you do not need a degree in electronics to be able to understand the basics of hardware. In fact, as hardware is *completely* logical, it is in many ways a lot easier to understand than software! Nearly all the hardware which goes to make up a computer is composed of building bricks called *gates*. Even the most complex chips are composed of large numbers of gates. If you open the lid of your computer, you will see many chips of all sizes scattered about. The gates we will be looking at first are the small ones with either 14 or 16 legs. On the top of the chip will be a type number beginning with "74", which may be followed by "L" or "LS", which just mean there is a small difference in the chip's power consumption or speed without altering its function. The number ends with another two or three digits which determine the actual type of gate. One package may contain between 1 and 6 gates of a particular type. Here is a very simple gate, called an *inverter*. Its type number is 7404.



Diagram 1

An inverter has two wires, or lines, associated with it, one *input* which we have called A, and one *output* called Q. As its name suggests, an inverter turns signals upside down. If we

WORKS

send a 1 into an inverter, we get a 0 out; if we feed it with a 0, it gives us a 1. Instead of talking about a line being a 1 or a 0, we often talk about it being true (1) or false (0).

We can describe the action of the inverter in a *truth table*. A truth table is just a diagram which allows us to show what outputs a gate will give us depending upon what inputs we feed into it. Here is the truth table for an inverter:

A	Q
0	1
1	0

This clearly shows that whichever state the input A is in, the output Q is in the opposite state. All this is very well, but exactly what is a '1' and what is a '0'. The two levels are defined by voltages. The normal supply voltage used in a micro is 5v (which is no higher than the output of many domestic batteries), and so we say that if an output is at 5v then the output is a '1'. If the voltage is at zero volts, then the output is a '0'. In practice, however, mass-produced chips are not identical, so we say that anything above about 2.5v is a '1' and anything below 0.5v is a '0'. If the voltage is in between 0.5v and 2.5v then something is seriously wrong, and the inverter will make its own mind as to what is going to appear on the output; we say that the output is undefined; it could be '1' or '0'.

Once we have studied the truth table and understand what an inverter does, we want a shorter way to describe the action of an inverter. When we come to design more complicated circuits, we will want a short concise way of describing the action of a gate. A sort of algebra has been designed to allow us to describe the action of combinations of gates. Using this algebra, we can write the action of an inverter like this:

$$Q = \bar{A}$$

Diagram 2

This is pronounced "Q equals not-A" (not-A meaning the opposite or inverse of A).

What other gates are there? Two other very common gates are the AND gate and the OR gate, but both of these have two inputs instead of one:

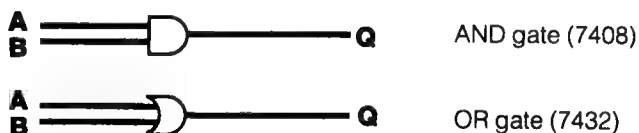


Diagram 3

The action of these gates is equivalent to the BASIC operators AND and OR. The AND gate gives an output if *both* its inputs A and B are 1's. The OR gate output will be true if *either* (or both) of its inputs are true. Here are the truth tables and algebraic definitions for these two gates:

A	B	Q	Q = A B
0	0	0	
0	1	0	
1	0	0	Truth table for AND gate
1	1	1	

A	B	Q	Q = A B
0	0	0	
0	1	1	Truth table for OR gate
1	0	1	
1	1	1	

The two symbols and are very easily confused. The method I have found easiest is that looks like an 'n', which is the middle of aNd. If you can remember this, then must be OR by the process of elimination.

What can we use these gates for: Let us consider a piece of equipment containing a motor. We will not bother ourselves too much about what the equipment is or what it does and only look at features which concern us. In the interests of safety, we want to stop the motor whenever someone opens the door of the equipment. We have a signal from a switch on the door called DOOROPEN which becomes true whenever the door is opened, and a motor controller with an input, MOTORON, which turns the motor on whenever a 1 is applied on the input. In other words, whenever DOOROPEN is true (the door is open), we want to set MOTORON false. This is obviously a case for an inverter:

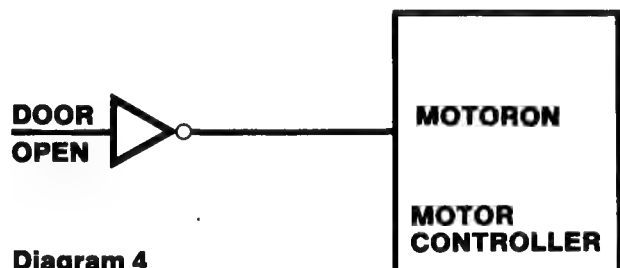


Diagram 4

Now let us add an extra complication. The motor is to be controlled from a time switch, so that it only runs at certain times of the day. The time switch gives us a signal TIMEON which is true when the time switch wants the motor to be turned on. Before we can design a logic circuit to carry out this function, we must be clear about what we want the circuit to do. We can use the algebraic expressions for the gates to do this. We want the output from the circuit, MOTORON, to be

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HARDWARE—HOW IT WORKS

true when TIMEON is true and DOOROPEN is false. We can write this:

$$\text{MOTORON} = \text{TIMEON} \quad \text{DOOROPEN}$$

In other words, we say "MOTORON equals TIMEON and not DOOROPEN". From this we can develop the following circuit:

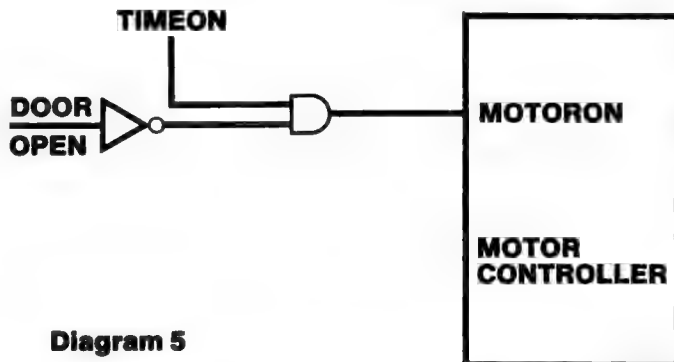


Diagram 5

As an exercise, those of you who are so inclined can add a manual switch, so that an operator can force the motor to be on regardless of what the time switch is saying. The motor should still be turned off if the door is opened, however. Don't fret if you get stuck, we will print the answer in next month's issue.

The three gates we have looked at are in fact all we need to develop any circuit which just involves looking at the level of various inputs and producing a number of outputs. The word for this kind of circuit is 'combinational' or 'combinatorial' depending on where you were educated! Several arrangements of more than one gate crop up again and again, and so chip manufacturers also produce chips to carry out these functions, to save us a bit of trouble. One of these, the Exclusive-OR, is also a BASIC operator.

Here is its truth table:

A	B	Q	Q = A B
0	0	0	Truth table for exclusive-OR gate (7486)
0	1	1	
1	0	1	
1	1	0	

From this we can see that the output Q is true, if A or B, but *not both*, is true, that is Q is true if A and B are different. See if you can design a circuit using the basic three gates, AND, OR and NOT to produce an exclusive-OR gate.

Two more gates will complete our list. The first is the NAND gate, 7400, which is just an AND gate followed by an inverter:



Diagram 6

A	B	Q	Q = (A B)
0	0	1	Truth table for NAND gate
0	1	1	
1	0	1	
1	1	0	

Notice that the column under "Q" in the truth table can be worked out by applying an invert operation to the "Q"-column of the AND gate.

The second new gate is the NOR gate, 7402, which is an OR gate followed by an inverter:



Diagram 7

See if you can work out its truth table from those of the inverter and OR gate.

We will now look at a chip which contains quite a large number of gates. It is called a decoder, 74138, and is used in pretty well all computers. A typical device may have 3 inputs (A0 to A2) and 8 outputs (Q0 to Q7):

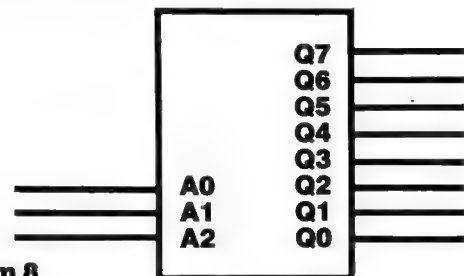


Diagram 8

The way this device works is really quite simple. If we think of the 3 input lines as forming a binary number in the range 0 (000) to 7 (111), then each number causes the corresponding output to be true. For example if A0=0, A1=1 and A2=1, this forms the number 110, that is 6, so output Q6 will be true. The most common use for this device is in selecting different parts of memory. The memory of our computer may be composed of a number of RAM chips, each 4 kbytes big. Each RAM chip will contain 4096 memory addresses, that is \$1000 in hexadecimal. When the processor wants to access memory location \$2000 or \$3000, we need to select RAM2 or RAM3 respectively. By feeding the correct bits of the address into a decoder chip, we can use the outputs to select the correct RAM chip. Each RAM chip contains \$1000 elements, 0 to \$FFF, so we will need 12 address lines going to each chip, A0 to A12. If we think of the address as a 16 bit binary number, we can easily see which lines we need:

15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
				3		0				0				0	

We can use address lines 12 to 14 to feed a decoder with 8 outputs, each of which select one of our 8 RAM chips.

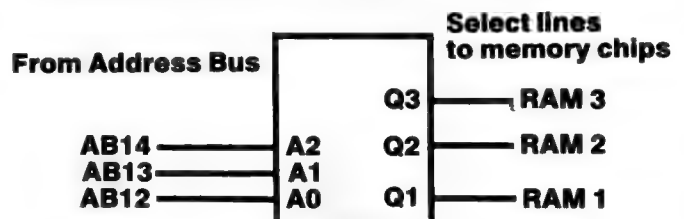


Diagram 9

This is a good example of how much easier it is to work in hexadecimal when dealing with the nuts and bolts of computing! Next month we will be looking at how the different parts of a computer, processor, memory etc. are linked by the various buses.

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SILICON OFFICE

Can I upgr

Dear Sir,

I am considering the purchase of a microcomputer, possibly BBC Model B or equivalent, but am unable to find out whether it would be suitable for tasks I have in mind for the future. Your magazine invites "confused" readers to write to you, hence this letter.

Initially I intend using the computer for learning to program, games, etc., but as my practice grows I will want to use it for accounting-book-keeping services to my clients (ledgers, wages), production of accounts from incomplete records and word processing.

I should be grateful if you would let me know whether it would be possible to expand, say the BBC B, with the addition of disk drives, printer etc. so as to be able to handle the above tasks. And if so, would it be advisable to do so or would it be better to opt for a business system from the outset.

I am fairly new to computing and what little I know about computers is largely due to your magazine. I look forward to your reply.

*D. M. Gudka,
Woodview,
Thorrington,
Essex, CO7 8JL*

First of all, Mr Gudka, I'd like to commend you for your wisdom in asking this question *before* deciding which computer to buy! *MicroComputer Printout's* "confused" advertisement has resulted in a deluge of letters being passed to me by the Editor, primarily asking the same question: Which computer should I buy?

by David Eldridge

It has been an interesting exercise grading these letters into different groups, and I will be dealing with all of the most common misunderstandings and difficulties over the next few issues, so keep 'em coming!

One of the most frequent misconceptions arises because the newcomer is unaware of the difference between a home microcomputer and a business microcomputer.

Reasons for this are manifold. First, quite a few microcomputers can successfully be used in either environment. Furthermore, several of today's more popular business systems have their historical roots planted firmly in the home and education market sectors. PET, Apple and Tandy TRS-80 all come to mind as good examples from the days when a lack of peripherals and sophisticated software meant that business applications required a lot of hard work – and knowledge – on the part of the user.

The situation has been further complicated by the introduction of mass-market low-cost home computers, some promoted with the aid of distinctly dubious

advertising claims relating to their suitability for business use.

In previous columns, I have gone into detailed explanations as to what can and cannot be stored in a home computer's memory; where cassette is applicable; and when disks are mandatory (the case for most business uses). The end conclusion is invariably that while a machine such as the ZX81 is excellent for learning to program on, it cannot realistically run commercial applications.

Memory capacity

You, however, clearly recognise the difference between home and business computers, and are asking a far more fruitful question: Can a home computer with good expansion facilities be upgraded to compete with a business system?



Can I buy a BBC computer to learn programming, and then add peripherals for business, later.....

To answer this, I must first outline where the two types of computer differ and where they are similar. Both, for example, can be based on the same microprocessor (usually a 6502 or Z-80) and hence can process at comparable speeds. Differences in RAM memory capacities are not great, either: the better home computers will usually yield up to 32K bytes, and while some business machines have 48K, 64K or more, a large chunk of this is used *instead of ROM* to house the language or operating system. Though the trend now is towards more businesslike languages, notably Pascal and COBOL, most home *and* business computing is still done using BASIC.

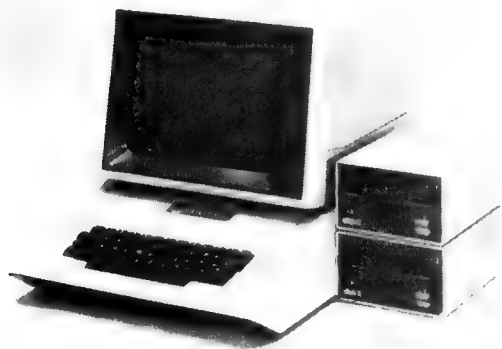
A business BASIC will contain commands relating to storage of information on disk, whereas BASICs in home computers major on the handling of colour, graphics and sound (though BBC BASIC copes admirably with both). Keyboards are similar in functions, as are screen sizes. A business computer will opt for the maximum number of columns, though, again, the BBC B scores well with 80. So

Which computer should I buy?

ade, later?

where do they differ?

It should be stated that considered purely as a CPU (i.e. a computer without peripherals), home computers these days offer far better value for money than business computers. They have colour, sound, graphics, plug-in cartridges and interfaces for joysticks, light pens and all manner of other goodies. This is primarily because purpose-built home computers are a more recent development and have taken advantage of advances in technology – particularly in the area of video/sound controller chips and the use of Uncommitted Logic Arrays and related devices to replace the myriad of discrete but unsophisticated logic circuits previously required. Compare, for example, the BBC with the PET, Apple and Tandy – all of which have changed little over the past four years.



..... or should I buy a business system from the outset?

New, purpose-designed business computers are now starting to appear on the market which make use of up-to-date technology. The Sirius 1 (*see feature last issue – Ed*) is likely to set the trend for developments over the next two years. But why are the PET, Apple and Tandy's still selling?

Peripherals

One answer is peripherals: business systems are more likely to have peripherals designed for business use. The disks have higher capacities and the disk operating systems (DOS) can handle the kind of record structure best suited to commercial transactions. (This is not always true, however, as the capacity of a single drive disk can be anything from 90K to 1.2MB). Printers are faster, have more readable typefaces, and are of a more rugged design. And of course when buying a business system, it is a decided advantage not to have to purchase each component from a different supplier.

Yet this distinction is fading rapidly. Modern home

computers (the BBC B included) have RS232 interfaces that enable them to drive *any* printer of your choosing, and the Commodore VIC can drive all of the sophisticated PET peripherals

Physical design, though, remains a valid, but often overlooked, distinction – both from the viewpoint of reliability and ergonomics (convenience of use by operator). Under the first heading, an all-in-one or integrated design is going to stand up to prolonged use better than one which relies on an external power supply, UHF modulator and a host of interconnected add-ons resembling Spaghetti Junction. There is, however, a great deal of controversy as to whether built in disk drives are a boon or bane.

Good ergonomic design is rare on all but the latest generation of computers – outside the advertising slogans but, generally speaking, a business computer will have a better laid out keyboard with good 'feel', and a sharper screen display that is less likely to induce operator eyestrain

Software

But far and away the most important difference is software: indeed, the best axiom for selecting a business system is to look first for the software package(s) to meet your requirements, and then see which hardware it will run on. Generally speaking, the larger the installed user base of any one system the greater the range and quality of business software available for it. Which is why the PET, Apple and Tandy still do so well, not to mention the others (*see Which Business System, this issue – Ed*). Even given sufficient time, the most popular home computers are unlikely to catch up; because most development emphasis will be in the fields of entertainment and education

There is one way in which a home computer can access a whole library of business packages, and that is via the standard operating system, CP/M. Certainly, there are some excellent word processors and Calc programs that will run on any CP/M machine (which usually means one with a Z-80 microprocessor and 64K of RAM). However, programs written under CP/M generally can't take advantage of the individual features of a particular machine, such as programmable function keys and good screen layouts. Hence some of the most user-friendly and powerful programs are written only for one particular machine.

So much for the generalities; now let's look briefly at how well the BBC B machine could be upgraded to a business system. Though based on a 6502 microprocessor, the design incorporates a clever system called 'The Tube' which allows processing to be passed to an external processor. The manufacturers are planning to produce a Z-80 device (which would run CP/M) and one to run Motorola's powerful 16-bit processor, the 68000. So given time, the BBC micro will be able to run a certain amount of existing software, though I would doubt that much will be developed specifically for this machine, at least in the ►

IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING WORDS GIVE YOU A BUZZ . . . ANALYSIS STATISTICS DESIGN PLOTTING GRAPHICS REPORT WRITING SPECIFICATIONS SCHEDULES COSTING PLANT MAINTENANCE PRODUCTION CONTROL SIMULATIONS IEEE INTERFACING INSTRUMENT CONTROL MONITORING TERMINAL COMMUNICATIONS PAPERTAPE READING PUNCHING & EDITING SELF PROGRAMMING BASIC ASSEMBLER LANGUAGE MACHINECODE... **GIVE US A BUZZ (OR SEND BACK THE COUPON)**

The micro comes of age. The PET has come a long way since micros were regarded as toys. It's designed and built for demanding work and this shows in the 32K memory and 80 column screen as well as in its impressive disk capacity. When it comes to languages, you'll find the PET fluent in BASIC, PASCAL, FORTH, COMAL, LISP, PILOT, FORTRAN, APL and ASSEMBLER.

It can be used as a complete system in itself, or can be linked to other PETs or a mainframe.

Who needs PET? And why? The list above speaks for itself, but that's only part of the story as the PET now has over 600 applications. It's good news for any engineer who's tried to get even a modest budget approved – the PET is very acceptable to the most sceptical of money people.

It's an attractive proposition, too, to DP professionals who need their fingers on the pulse and are fed up with waiting for their turn on the company computer.

In fact, it's the nearest thing to the all-purpose computer for everyone. An extravagant claim? A demonstration can prove it to be true.

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What's more, many of our dealers have specific expertise – which means they can advise on anything from business systems to specialist technical applications. So, if your particular problem is of a highly specialised nature, it may be best to contact our Information Department direct. They will then recommend the dealers who understand – and who speak your kind of language.

What does all this cost? Not a lot. In fact, our computers start at £200 and go through to £8,000 – which will buy you a business system. That's just one more reason why any professional worth his salt would be interested in a microcomputer that's made its name in the business world . . . but is far more than just an efficient business brain



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Can I upgrade, later?

immediate future.

The story on peripherals is similar. Almost any printer can be attached and a comprehensive range of other devices is 'under development'. To date, however, there is little clue as to the capacity and arrival date of, say, the floppy disk.

Physical design

On physical design, the BBC begins to fall down. The casing is rather large for desktop use – particularly as the T.V. screen or monitor cannot be stood on top, and all the peripherals, external processors and so forth will make for a cluttered desktop.

So what is my advice? If you aren't completely sure about going into microcomputing, Mr Gudka, buy the BBC machine and have fun learning to program using its extensive graphics and sound capabilities. After a few months, you will soon know if you can live with its design as a business system, and should by then have a better idea as to what peripherals are available.

Don't, however, fall into the trap of assuming you *must* upgrade the system you've bought. The BBC B will cost you £400, any business system (upgraded or dedicated) is going to be nearer the £1500-£2000 mark. So it might be cheaper to sell the BBC and purchase a full business system when you are ready.

If, however, you are committed to computing then buy a PET or Apple (without disks), first, and add the appropriate peripherals as you need them. They are both perfectly good for learning to program on – though of course you won't have the sophisticated colour and graphics.

One final word of warning. Your letter suggests that you intend to write your own business software. Don't underestimate the work involved. The better packages now appearing have many man-months or years of work behind them. Unless you have a really novel application in mind, I suggest that you would be much better off looking at existing packages than writing your own. The functions you mentioned are all heavy-weight applications, requiring very sophisticated programming to run efficiently on a micro.

All the more reason why you should really be looking at a business system from the start.

If you are thinking of buying a microcomputer for a particular application and would like advice through this column, we invite you to send us details. We also welcome correspondence from existing owners regarding their experiences of buying or using any machine.

HAVE YOU MOVED?

If you are moving house, please be sure to let us know your new address so that your copies of *MicroComputer Printout* can be redirected. It would be helpful if you could enclose your previous wrapper.

TEXAS

Texans, as followers of 'Dallas' will know, do things big.

Despite this the TI99/4A from Texas Instruments has made only a small impact here.

Richard Pawson discovered an inexpensive computer, well supported with peripherals and software, that's being sold in a totally different way to its competitors.



Newly-launched TI Invaders are 'merely aggressive' or 'downright nasty'!

In order for a new microcomputer to establish itself in the marketplace, it has to be well-supported. When most machines are first launched, however, they are supported not by programs and peripherals, but merely by nebulous promises. "We have an extensive programme of software development under way. Floppy disk and printer are scheduled for next autumn, with a modem to follow," is the usual line. So when a machine is launched, complete with disk, modem, interfaces, memory expansion, printer and a goodly range of cassette, disk and cartridge software already available – that alone bears examination.

The TI99/4A from Texas Instruments is a case in point; perhaps *the* case in point. Launched last September at a price of £299 including VAT, the 99/4A is aimed directly at the home computer market – with excellent colour, graphics and sound. One of the most refreshing things is that the manufacturer has made no attempt to pretend that it can be used for business. TI have not developed the useless (and we use the word advisedly) Payroll and Accounting packages which other home computer manufacturers seem to view as a priority.

Conservative marketing

So with the TI now establishing its distribution amongst computer shops and national department stores it is surprising to find that sales have been only 'moderate'. This can be put down in part to TI's rather conservative marketing techniques (compared with the kind of enthusiasm whipped up by Commodore's new product 'leaks' and the BBC Microcomputer), but the main cause is an historical one.

The TI99/4 was first launched nearly two years ago – intended for the US home computer market. Over here, it needed an American standard colour monitor to achieve the colour graphics, putting the total price up to £1,000.

"Obviously the price tag made the 99/4 less attractive," says Mike Lunch, General Manager of TI's UK Consumer Products Division, "but in many ways the machine was ahead of its time. Two years ago personal computing was firmly in the hands of enthusiasts. The 99/4's strong points – colour, graphics, sound and plug-in cartridges – were criticised by many as being unnecessary. Now the other manufacturers have identified the home market, they have all followed suit!"

The new 99/4A, however, not only has a PAL interface to drive any UK colour T.V., but sports an improved typewriter-like keyboard and a number of other minor improvements. Those who are familiar with Texas Instruments will be aware of their reputation of quality in every department: construction, design, reliability, documentation and packaging. The 99/4A clearly reflects the company's twin roots: programmable calculators at one extreme and minicomputers at the other. In some features this design origin works to its credit, and in others detrimentally.

One of the greatest strengths of the TI is in its expansion – the peripherals mentioned earlier. It should be pointed out, however, that while the quality of construction is excellent and the specification functional, the units are all relatively expensive and one of them

particularly "outstanding". The disk controller costs £200, and then a further £300 for each drive unit, for example. The strength is that a complete system *can* be purchased from one manufacturer. "It's like the camera market," maintains Mike Lunch, "the most common reason for purchasing an SLR is that it can be expanded with a vast range of lenses, wide angle to telephoto. Yet the average number of lenses bought by an SLR owner is only one and a half."

Clearly, most users will stick with the basic 99/4A, using cassettes and cartridges.

Professional use

Those who have a professional use in mind will purchase a complete system – taking the price well beyond £1,000. This includes the programmer who wishes to develop machine code for the 16-bit TMS9900 microprocessor on which the machine is based – since machine code cannot be accessed without disk and memory expansion.



Twin joysticks, or 'wired controllers' as TI have it....

In our article on Computers of the Future (November 1981), Guy Kewney coined a new phrase: The Convivial Computer. This referred to a machine where the manufacturer makes available all possible system documentation about a machine, thereby encouraging independent suppliers to develop software, peripherals, and the formation of user groups to exchange ideas, information and programs. The TI99/4A is *not* a convivial computer – there is no system-level documentation, nor is there any means of accessing the machine at system level. The lack of PEEK, POKE and SYS commands would leave the experienced enthusiast feeling straight-jacketed – unable to explore and find new tweaks and tricks.

Yet in TI's case this is clearly policy, rather than the more usual reason: incompetence. The machine is aimed at the typical home user who wants to use primarily off-the-shelf packages and perhaps to write a few programs himself – whence the easy-to-use BASIC.

The evaluation below is conducted along the same lines as our *Which Home Computer?* feature in the February issue, but examining each area in more detail. Our test system, which was in use for four weeks, did include all the peripherals – though we have not covered them individually in the evaluation for reasons of space.

Physical Construction

Under this heading we refer both to quality of

construction and convenience of design, and, not surprisingly, the TI scores well in both. The computer itself is solid, attractively finished in silver and black, and of a size that makes it equally suitable for use on a desk-top, on the floor in front of the telly, or the position most favoured by our boffins: placed across the knees whilst lounging in a deep armchair.

The rugged quality of all connectors for peripherals and expansion give considerable reassurance compared with those of cheaper competitors – where the PCB edge-connectors are prone to both dust and corrosion from 'sticky fingers'. This is particularly true of the arrangements for inserting ROM cartridges or 'solid state software' as the label on the front grandiosely portrays it. The use of a recessed well to guide the cartridge in, and spring loaded doors to protect the connectors was far more satisfactory than some of the other mechanisms we have encountered.

The only thing to mar the configuration was the need for a (bulky) mains transformer and separate UHF modulator (also large) outside the main casing, similar in this respect to Commodore's VIC. For desktop use, these units could be well hidden, but installed on the lounge floor or coffee table made for a rather messy layout.

Both the exterior design and ruggedness are mirrored in the various peripherals – with the exception of the steel-encased disk drive which looks as though it has been bought-in ready assembled from another manufacturer.

The peripherals connect directly together by means of an expansion bus which passes through each device. This eliminates the need for myriad interconnection cables, though each major unit still requires its own mains supply.

However, by the time you have added speech synthesiser, expansion memory, RS232 interface, disk (with controller) and printer, the system is beginning to reach unmanageable proportions. Texas have foreseen this problem and at time of going to press, we learned of their intention to market a 'rack' system with common power supply, into which various peripherals could be plugged, as cards.

It should be remembered, though, that the TI is marketed firmly as a home computer, and though well-supported with peripherals, few installations are likely to upgrade to the full system.

Keyboard

First impression of the keyboard was that it was rather small, with keys closely packed. Measuring up against the office typewriter's, however, showed that this was not the case. Texas say that the whole unit has in fact been cannibalised from one of their terminals. It is the lack of the normal editing functions at either end of the QWERTY bit that creates the impression of smallness – and this omission must be seen as a disadvantage.

It is overcome in part, by the use of CTRL (Control), FCTN (Function), and SHIFT keys to assign multiple functions to each key – including the missing editing functions such as Insert, Delete and Cursor movements. Until well practised, this can give rise to the 'all fingers and thumbs' syndrome – and is certainly not conducive to fast editing.

The use of CTRL and FCTN is partly redeemed by a white plastic strip above the keyboard on which you can write your own labels and legends for the top row of keys – especially useful when writing games, or for use by small children. Several blank strips are supplied with the computer (the idea obviously originates from TI's programmable calculator – the TI59), though, disappointingly, they had not been made use of in any of the otherwise excellent software we reviewed.

Opinion as to the 'feel' of the keys was mixed, from the users we tried it out on. Some said it corresponded well to that of a typewriter, while others felt it was spongy and imprecise. The demonstration unit we tested had evidently seen the wars, and one or two keys had started to become a little stiff.

Screen

The screen on a TI99/4A consists of 32 columns by 24 rows of blocks which may hold any characters in any colours. Only 28 columns are available for BASIC text, however, which meant that many BASIC lines had to be split up on the screen.

Unusually, the SHIFTed characters are not lower case, but smaller versions of the same characters. We didn't really like the result, though it may have been done because many people find it difficult to read lower case on a computer screen since letters like g and y do not have true descenders. Any or all of the character set could be changed, if desired, by means of the user-definable character function.

Colour/Graphics

We encountered no problems in tuning the television into the colour 'test-card' picture which the TI portrays on the screen when first switched on. Colour was clear and definition sharp, except for a few combinations of colours which gave rise to rather 'vague' borders.



Disk Controller – shown here with one drive....

The whole screen is normally cyan (pale blue), changing to green while a program is actually running (a novel, but rather useful trick) – though it can easily be switched to any other of the sixteen colours on the TI's

TEXAS

palette. Any of the characters can be positioned on the screen with its own (foreground) colour – together with a background colour covering the small square behind the character.

Though there are no high-resolution plotting functions, as such, the TI allows the user to redefine any of the standard characters, as well as create his own special graphics characters for games or scientific symbols.

TI enhanced BASIC, however, provides colour graphics functions that are quite incredible – similar and in some ways superior to Atari's player-missile graphics. The programmer may define a number of 'sprites' – objects of any shape and colour that may be given speeds and moved around the screen at will.

Sixteen different levels of priority may be specified so that sprites can move in front of or behind each other, and there are specific functions to detect collisions or 'coincidences', in other words a crash or a score.

Sound

A large variety of sounds from melodious to cacophonous can be produced through the T.V. speaker – including synthesised speech if you purchase the appropriate peripheral for £99.

The effects are easy to produce, even for the beginner, by means of the SOUND command in BASIC. Duration, together with the frequency and volume specifiers for up to three components can be specified – in other words, up to three-part harmonies are possible.

In addition, a noise component can be specified – varying from a high-pitched whistle to a headache-inducing throb – all designed to assist in the production of explosions, zoomsplats and aliens dying excruciating deaths.

Don't let this put you off – a little bit of programming and you can reproduce some quite acceptable chamber music.

TI market a cartridge pack called Music Maker in which actual notes (semi quavers, crotchets and the like) can be edited on the screen, played and stored on cassette tape or disk.

Editing

In "Which Home Computer?" in our February edition, the TI99/4A showed consistently high in most departments, and as this report demonstrates, our in-depth evaluation supports this. One marking, however, we would like to downgrade somewhat after many hours of usage – for program editing.

Though editing controls exist – and it is therefore possible to modify any section of a program by inserting, deleting or overwriting characters, it is necessary to specify the lines you wish to alter, rather than move the cursor direct to the error. To be fair, the TI method only looks poor when compared to the excellent full-screen editing found on Commodore's PET and VIC models.

Sadly, the TI editing bears rather more re-

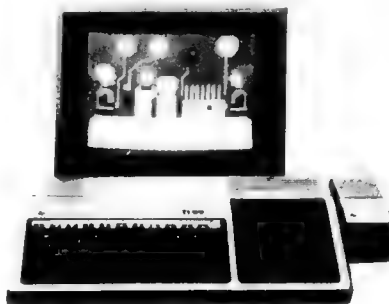
semblance to the kind of line editing found on BASIC's written for use with teletypes and early terminals, and indeed Texas Instrument's background in minicomputers may have been influential.

BASIC

Texas have opted for their own version of BASIC, rather than the most standard – Microsoft – implementation. On balance, the advantages of this decision seem to outweigh the disadvantages.

Under the latter heading we must place the scarcity of string handling functions (LEFT\$ and RIGHT\$ for example) found in most BASICs, and the fact that TI BASIC is rather pedantic about where you place spaces in your expressions (which most others aren't). However, generally speaking, TI BASIC is remarkably compatible with Microsoft – much more so than many other versions, anyway – and you should have little difficulty in converting program listings to run.

The advantages are mainly additional commands designed to help the new programmer. They include Toolkit-like functions for program development and debugging, as well as special commands for coping with sound, colour, graphic drawing and the optional joysticks. Many of the latter must be preceded by a CALL statement which seems a trifle unnecessary, though may have been incorporated with future expansion in mind.



The TI99/4A's colour graphics and low-cost speech synthesiser make it popular with young children.

TI Enhanced BASIC is a plug-in cartridge which is sold separately (with its own manual and quick reference card) – and we would recommend it as a must for any one who has got past the beginnings in programming.

Besides the superb graphics functions mentioned earlier, there are also some sophisticated facilities for accepting/validating data from the keyboard, and formatting results on the screen.

Documentation

This is of a high standard – consistent with TI's reputation for calculator manuals. A handy: "Read This First" leaflet explains how to set up the computer and check that all is in order.

"Beginner's BASIC" provides an introduction to some of the simpler ideas in BASIC programming for the complete beginner. The reader is shown how to create simple colour and sound effects early on – which is encouraging.

In addition to this book, comes the Users Reference Guide, which gives a detailed description of each command, with a handy reference at the front. At the end of the book are a number of sample programs to type in, glossary and one or two reference tables.

There is a distinct lack of any system information for the enthusiast, such as memory maps, or system level routines. This information would be fairly irrelevant, anyway, since there are no PEEK, POKE and SYS equivalents for penetrating the BASIC operating system. But it does confirm that TI intend their machine for the beginner or person who uses pre-packaged software, rather than the enthusiastic programmer.

The two books together do not provide a full course in programming. One is for the newcomer, the other is for those who know BASIC. If you wish to progress beyond the first, you will really need to purchase a separate book on programming.

Game Controls

The TI99/4A permits two joysticks (or Wired Controllers as TI refer to them) to be connected for purposes of playing games or moving objects around the screen in educational programs. We found the units to be well constructed and convenient to use – though many of our 'guinea pigs' said they preferred the more chunky designs of Atari and Commodore.

The joysticks were of the eight position variety, rather than permitting an infinity of different positions.

There is no provision on the Texas for game paddles or a light pen for pointing to answers directly on the screen, which is a pity.

Plug-in programs

This has to be one of the strong points for the TI – the quality and range of Solid State Software putting it at least on a par with Atari.

As mentioned earlier, the mounting/loading arrangements and physical construction of the cartridge system are far more satisfactory than most. Inserting a new cartridge while the machine has switched on caused the system to reset to its 'front page' – a kind of test card showing all the colours and the TI logo. Pressing any key showed the menu: Press 1 for TI BASIC, 2 for Space Invaders, etc – whatever the new cartridge contained.

TI publish a catalogue of software titles, showing what is available on cassette, disk or cartridge, and what ancillary equipment is needed to run them.

All the more popular packages are sold in cartridge form, though we would make the point that several are very expensive, costing up to £40.

Although TI have made use of a number of software companies on both sides of the Atlantic, development has clearly been under central control. The result is that all the packages have a pleasing consistency in packaging, documentation, and the use of specific keys for moving objects, changing options and replaying games.

Secondly, because most packages were specifically developed for TI, they make full use of the colour, graphics and sound facilities. In a few cases, we felt, the designs had gone overboard, assaulting the senses and nerves with a barrage of sound and colour. TI claim, however, that all of their programs have gone through extensive user opin-



Megabuck crime

In this modern day of microchip technology non-violent megabuck crime is easier than ever before. Indeed, it may even be conducted from the comfort and relative safety of a swivel chair, if not a Parker-Knoll reclining job suitably arranged before an open fire and an open cocktail cabinet.

And the reason for all this facility exists, gentle reader, within the confines of your own premises, or why else would you be wasting your readies on this estimable, but highly specialised comic?

Correct. It is indeed computers of which we speak. And we are not referring to weekend removal jobs in which proprietors of large computing organisations are deprived of a roomful of IBM hardware by a team of skilled professionals with a large lorry and a great number of previously empty tea-chests. My word no. We are concerned here with highly-skilled individuals who simply have unrestricted access to computers handling large sums of somebody else's cash. Although we should point out at this stage that the devil incarnate of modern society, the chip itself, is not without a certain value.

Regard, if you will, the smallest fingernail on your hand. Conservatively value it at fifty quid. Then work out what a full lorry load of similar-sized fingernails is worth. £1.5 million wouldn't be too far out, if you're at all interested. And that is almost exactly the value of a consignment of untraceable chips which went missing not so long ago in that part of California known to locals as Silicon Chip Valley, for reasons which ought to be obvious. Chips, say our transatlantic cousins, are as negotiable as dollar bills, which makes possession of a great number of them even more attractive than possession of a great number of pound notes.

Which brings you back to money.

It's funny stuff, cash. Be advised that if you possess a lot of it, and like having a lot of it, you are not alone. The world is full of people who would all like a lot of it, and in many cases the money these other people would like to possess is yours. If you have it in sufficient quantity these other people will soon discover a way to estrange you. And if at any

stage this money of yours comes into contact with a computer, however fleetingly, that is probably the moment when it is at greatest risk and may be lifted with maximum ease.

Rehabilitation schemes

Years ago the American Government introduced rehabilitation schemes into its jails. The most popular in-house training course was lock-making. That was years ago. These days the most popular course in Yankee nicks is computer science. No similar statistics are available for British prisons ...

Despite this, and despite a number of spectacular crimes performed with the co-operation of a computer, most firms who process money via a computer remain endearingly blind to the possibilities for fraud. As usual, it's the Americans who are bigger and better in this field and who have chalked up the best crimes.

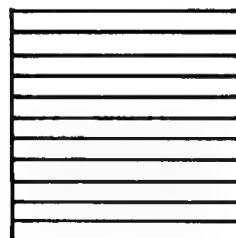
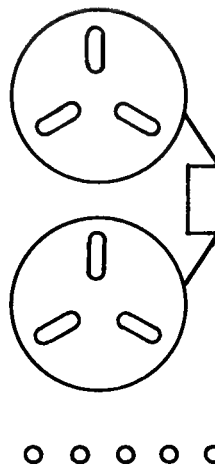
One employee of a large financial concern programmed the computer to pay vast sums into a private account in a Manhattan bank. He also programmed it to return the cash to it's rightful owners every time there was an audit. All he stole was the interest while the loot was in his account. He was eventually, and accidentally brought to book, as it were, because he was betting on the gee-gees to the tune of fifteen thousand pounds. Every day...

Another smart guy lifted several million dollars and turned it into diamonds. He was caught trying to fence more than three million pounds-worth of legitimately purchased ice...

Another chappie, with a friend fronting a legitimate savings account, had it away on his toes with almost two million nicker...

Dormant accounts

Yet another simply milked dormant bank accounts. All banks are riddled with these; the account-holder has died, moved or just forgotten about his or her account. Individually they're worth nothing. Most of them don't hold more than £50, generally a lot less. Collectively they amount to millions, and the advantage is that there's no irate customer to complain. One whizz-kid creamed a quarter of a



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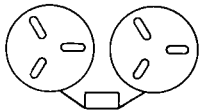
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cent from every account in the computer each month, and paid it to himself. He also made millions before he was spotted, but unsurprisingly, none of the account-holders noticed the theft.

The interesting aspects of all these crimes fall into two parts. First, and maybe most worrying, is that in practically every case the crimes would have all gone undetected by the company or individuals being robbed since the key is consistent theft of minute amounts. Most of these microchip privateers came to grief because of something they did after the successful accomplishment of their activity, like gambling heavily.

This comes about principally because the level of stealing is almost imperceptible and also because the organisations in question were not sufficiently aware of the risks and took too few precautions. Although we should not underestimate the intelligence of the criminal at this level neither should we ignore the obvious lessons which seem not to have been learnt; computer fraud can happen to anyone and a few inbuilt safeguards ought to be implemented in order to minimise the threat.



Determined thief

Even this is not enough, though. The same rule applies to computers as it does to everything else. If you have something valuable and a determined thief wants it then he'll find a way to get it, no matter how well you protect it. The trouble here is that most people, when confronted with the prospect of a determined thief, still conjure up the image of a rather ugly thug in black mask, stripey jersey and toting a sack marked 'swag' over his shoulder. They have difficulty looking along a line of freshly-scrubbed graduates earnestly slaving over a hot desk and seeing them as anything other than innocent baboons fit possibly for management fodder and precious little else.

The very idea that any one of these baby-faced pinstripe jobs might do for thieving what the Beatles did for Liverpool is entirely beyond their grasp. Yet this is regrettably the case. Let's face it, Crippen, at a midget five feet and a gnats wossname tall, hardly looked like a mass murderer. He looked like any other respectable gent. Like you or I, say. Blimey, you might even be Crippen for all I know. Or, and I have it on the highest authority that this is far more likely to be the case, you may be the thieving toad who's been depriving me of 1/4p every month for the last ten years.

Yes, it's a regrettable truism that while most department stores and other concerns which handle large sums of money in cash take stringent precautions against being ripped off by their own employees, even to the point

of paranoia and especially where the maximum inside job couldn't possibly net more than a few quid, very few of them demonstrate a similar level of sagacity in a situation where the heist would have more zeros than Liz Taylor has had husbands.

Take-home pay

The FBI believe that the annual proceeds from computer crime in the States may amount to as much as 300 million dollars; the average take-home pay of the electronic blagger being some half a million per shot. This may be an under-estimate since it is widely believed that many companies (especially the larger ones) are too embarrassed to own up afterwards.

Aside from the unlikely nature and appearance of the master criminal in these cases one of the main reasons that such frauds are so easy for the thief is the absence of the human element. Once upon a time (say about ten years ago) book-keeping operations were conducted by a roomfull of people who were jolly good at adding up and taking away; any one of these would be likely to spot an anomaly. Now we leave it all to the infallible computer. Unfortunately computers only do what they are told, and are too stupid to realise when they are being ripped off. In almost every case they are left more or less to their own devices, encouraged and shepherded only by a select few. Once one of the few decides to have a go the chances of being nabbed *in flagrante delicto* are remarkably slim.

Look at it this way. You get a phone bill, right? And unless it's well out of order you pay, soon as you get the third red notice, right? And even if it is right out of the ball park and you complain, what happens then? Some peroxide blonde at BT assures you that the bill is done on the computer and therefore can't be wrong, so naff off. And if you press your case, what happens then? They get the meter checked, find it's operating perfectly and suggest you stop prevaricating and cough up. Your doctor assures you that kneecaps are absolutely essential to the art of walking, so you pay, right? But suppose it was wrong? Suppose some smart ice-cream in the BT office has done a number on the computer and it's bumping up bills? The meter on the exchange is working fine. How often do they (or anyone else who sends out computer-originated bills) check up to see if the punters are being taken for a ride? A penny on every phone bill would be worth having, would it not?

Silly bill

Checking the computer is the last thing that anyone ever thinks of. But next time you get a silly bill you'll think twice, won't you? Bet the Gas Board don't. It's their computer, after all.

By now proprietors of Phone companies, Gas and Electricity Boards and Water Authorities all over the country will be throwing up their hands in horror, all agog to explain why it couldn't possibly happen. Permit me to

refer them at once to Stanley Mark Rifkin, who is currently languishing in the slammer, guest of Hollywood's most famous cowboy, R. Reagan, Esq. Rifkin is the chappie with the diamonds we mentioned earlier, who convinced a California bank that it *could* happen, and to the tune of more than ten million dollars...

Computer, um, errors, of this nature aren't always conducted deliberately, however. One American found himself accidentally the possessor of a large amount of below-the-line funding which came equipped with an astonishing collection of zeros at the end, and which could not be properly attributed to his legitimate business income. Fortunately for him he spotted it before the previous (and rightful) owner of same. By the time the gentlemen from the bank arrived to explain the mistake and ask if they could please have their money back the surprised beneficiary had transferred it to a foreign country, courtesy of some gnomes, and skipped, laughing all the way. It could happen to you, but don't hold your breath...

Impersonal computer

And that's the other thing. Every one of us would correctly look down a dignified and aloof proboscis if confronted with a thief. Picking pockets, blowing the doors off security vans and holding up banks with a variety of offensive armaments is a regrettable idiosyncrasy to which a few members of the human race are given, and we all correctly deplore such activity. But a great many people who feel that way about the less subtle crimes still harbour a sneaking regard for the quiet, clever thief who manages to put one over the boss of the big corporation and his impersonal computer without lifting a finger in anger or stirring from his chair. Most of us honestly believe that large companies can afford to lose the odd million here and there. Indeed there are many who think they deserve to get done from time to time.

The fact is that a genuine feeling in this country persists, based on the belief that if you earn more than five thousand a year and don't work on the Ford production line, then you're a filthy capitalist swine and ought to be relieved of the burden of your ill-gotten gains as soon as possible. Preferably by some form of modern-day Robin Hood with flowing locks and a sardonic smile of some kind, perhaps with a cigarette clenched between his teeth and a devil-may-care sneer at the doctor who has just predicted his imminent demise from an unknown wasting disease caused by slaving unsocial hours in less than salubrious conditions for an uncaring minion of a large corporation.

That's just our generation. Kids today, watching the box, weaned on Harold Robbins and similar from age three onwards, what will they be up to...?



Program D

Documentation is really the key to good programming, and yet is often the area given least attention. **Chris Preston** explains why it is so important and shows you how to pick up some 'good habits'.

Documentation is a very grey area in the working lives of most programmers. It is lumped with "washing the car" and "going to the dentist" in the list of things which ought to be done but tend to get put off as long as possible. As always though, the putting off only makes things worse, because once you have left a program for a few weeks or longer, the exact logic behind that cunning routine in line 2460 has faded from your mind, so that when something goes wrong you are left scratching your head and wondering how on earth it was supposed to work in the first place!

Documentation in one form or other is really the secret of good programming. By "good programming" I do not mean the ability to write a particular routine which takes less memory than anybody else's or runs so much faster. "Good programming", like "good behaviour" is something that must be acquired, but is difficult to teach. You will find that getting into the habit of writing full documentation for everything you code, far from wasting time, it can make life an awful lot easier.

So what does documentation involve? Documentation starts as soon as you have decided that you are going to write a program. There are several distinct phases that can be identified, as follows:

1. Planning Stage. We must write down what we want the program to do: what data we are going to give it; what outputs we want; and what processing is involved. The program should be broken down into sections, and each section described separately, with a "master plan" describing how the sections relate to each other.

2. Program design. We next design the program. This does not mean we sit down at the machine and start typing. Each of the sections we identified in the planning stage should be written on paper first and "bench tested", that is, going through the program manually with a paper and pencil, asking ourselves at each stage, "*What will the program do here?*"; "*Will the IF statement in line 1200 cause a jump?*"; "*Is this bit doing what I really want it to do?*" As well as

showing up many mistakes, this process helps us to fix details of the program in our minds, so that when the thing falls down when we first run it (and this is inevitable!), we can say, "Ah yes, I am not calling subroutine 15000", instead of "Why is there nothing in A\$? I wonder where I set that up?" Any potential problems which show up should be dealt with now; like bad pennies they will not go away. Remember Murphy's Law: If something can go wrong it will, and at the worst possible moment. Do not wait until the worst possible moment arrives: sort it out now.

3. Testing Phase. Once the program has been keyed in, it must be thoroughly tested. Any doubts we had in stage two about a particular part of the program should be put to good use by concentrating on that part of the program. Try to make it blow up. Key in ridiculous values. If the program collapses and you have to re-write a routine, be glad! That is one less bug! During the testing phase, the program is bound to be hacked around. If any of the changes affect the structure of the program then we must also change the documentation. Out-of-date documentation is almost as bad as none at all.

What form should this documentation take? Well there are various forms used depending on which stage of program writing we are at. In stage 1, the specification may still be somewhat nebulous and probably changing quite frequently, so we want our documentation to be easily alterable, too. When I first start to write a program, I make three lists. The first is "Program Inputs", which may be values from a disk file, or a keyboard or something exotic like another computer. For each input you should make a guess as to how long each item will be, say 30 characters for a name field, and a range of values, 0 to 5 for a numeric field. Complementary to the input list is a "Program Outputs" list. This gives, in fairly broad terms, what outputs we require from the program, either on the screen or printer, or going to another disk file. Again, field sizes and ranges of values should be included.

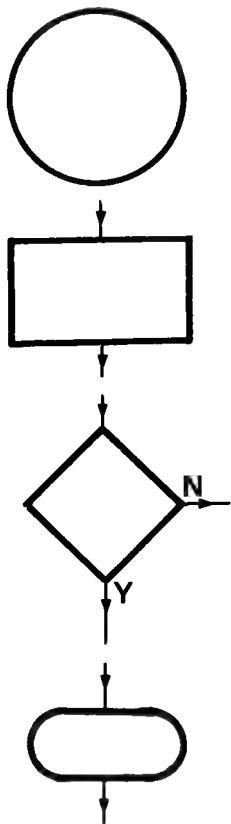
The last (and I mean the *last* list – this should wait until we have decided what the inputs and outputs are going to be) is the "Process List". This describes what the program is going to do with each of the inputs and how it is going to derive each of the outputs. When you write this list, you should be thinking ahead to the program itself, and put the list into a logical order, starting with reading the inputs, and then going on the calculation and output phases

Flowcharts

The next stage is a little more formal, as this is where we define exactly how the program is going to run. The easiest

Documentation

method of describing program flow is by means of flowcharts. There is a certain amount of awe surrounding flowcharts but there is really nothing to them at all. Flowchart templates are easy to obtain and not expensive, or you can draw them freehand if you are not too fussy on how pretty they look! There is unfortunately no standard for flowcharts, but the four symbols I use are fairly widespread:



At the top of the flowchart, this symbol gives the routine a name. At the bottom of a flowchart, it acts like a BASIC "GOTO" statement, to allow you to jump to another routine, or in the case of a subroutine, this acts as a RETURN statement.

This is the basic 'action' box. Any activities should be put into one of these boxes.

This is a 'decision' box, corresponding to a BASIC IF...GOTO statement. It does not matter whether the side or the bottom branch is the 'yes' branch, this should be organised to make the diagram easier to read. Always label both branches though, it makes it easier to spot mistakes!

This box corresponds to a BASIC 'GOSUB' statement, and is used to call a routine on another flowchart diagram somewhere.

As an example of flowcharting, Diagram 1 is a chart showing my procedure for getting up in the morning. (As this is supposed to be a family magazine, this particular flowchart has had to be heavily modified - Ed)

Layouts

Going hand in hand with the flowchart are screen and printer layouts, and file formats. Screen and printer layouts are best drawn on graph paper of a reasonable size and really do save a lot of time if you are doing a complex report. No more hunting through line after line of BASIC counting SPC's and TAB's wondering how far across the page you are and whether there is room for that extra field.

Drawing your layouts beforehand also allows you to experiment before you actually write the code, and hopefully get a more balanced, easier to read layout. Planning file layouts also saves a lot of time when it comes to writing the program. Instead of having to remember whereabouts each field in the record starts, you can just look it up. You can also plan file sizes much more easily.

A typical file layout might be:

Field Name	Length	Start	End
Car Make	20	1	20
Model	20	21	40
Engine Size	4	41	45
Colour	1	46	47

Notice that the colour field is only 1 character long. You can often save disk space if you have an alphanumeric field with a small number of possible values (red, blue, white, black, say) by using a shorter code to represent the values e.g. 0,1,2,3. Of course, the documentation must include a table giving the corresponding colour for each code!

How detailed should the flowcharts be? A very high level flowchart would just say, "Accept inputs", "Calculate answer", "Print answer". This is not much help! A very low-level flowchart is just the same as writing the program, with one box for each BASIC statement. The ideal lies between these two extremes, and depends largely on the temperament of the individual programmer. The point is that the flowchart should help you write your program, and afterwards, it should help you remember how it works. Within these constraints, the level of detail is up to you.

Having done all our layouts and flowcharts, the actual process of writing the program should now be almost automatic. If you have to stop and work out any values such as TAB's, then your preparation has not been complete enough.

Tables

Going hand in hand with the program writing are yet more tables. You should keep a list of all variables used, and what they are for. If a variable is a code for something, such as the colour code in our example above, you should make a note of the range it is allowed to take, 1 to 7 say. If you are debugging and find that it contains 13, something is wrong. If you did not know that 13 is illegal for that variable it would be much harder to spot. Any 'special' values, such as -1, for 'unknown' should be clearly marked, because if you look up element -1 in an array or file you will get into trouble, and without your table you might sit for hours wondering why on earth that variable has got -1 in it. Worse still, you might take out the line which sets the variable to -1 thinking it was in

Compilers are all the rage – but are they really useful? **Peter Wood** found that efficiency, speed and program size varies considerably – but that compiled “Adventure” on a PET makes a good test!

Like Garbage Collection (don't ask!)

The advantage is, of course, that you can alter lines, or parts of lines, at a moment's whim and run the program again straight away. Where compilers are clever is that they do all the hardwork in one go (and only once), putting the machine code out into a disk file (called an Object File) which then substitutes for the original program file you wrote (referred to as the Source File). Whenever you load and run the object file, you are really executing a machine code program, with all the benefits of speed you'd expect. The disadvantage (if it is one) is that you can't list the object file (since it's in hexadecimal) and you can't

ing a cigarette – remember that one?) and added the title “Waiting for the compiler to finish”. Need I say more?

Fifthly, size of object file – it's not much use having an object file that won't load into your computer through lack of memory space! Since compilers have to allocate room for variables at compile time (unlike the interpreter which merrily does it as it needs to), compiled programs may often be longer than their interpretive sources (although not always – more about this later on).

Lastly (whew) extra commands and statements – since we are effectively buying another language for the machine, why not reach for the moon and expect some extra functions as well. Some give 'em to you



Just like program generators, compilers are very trendy at the moment, especially for the PET. That's not to say that they're not useful – as they are – but rather that there's several around on the market. Before we get into the pros and cons (sic) of the various models available, I'll bore the experts by giving the reader an overview of what a compiler does and why. If this is old hat to you then feel free to jump on to the meatier bits.

Unfair discrimination!

My trusty old Penguin Dictionary of Microprocessors defines a compiler as: “1. A program which prepares a machine language program from instructions written in a source language” and “2. A harmless drudge” (which scores another point to Penguin for having a sense of humour – I think). As many of you will be aware, programs written directly in machine code (or via an assembler) work considerably faster than those written in good old BASIC. The reason behind this seemingly unfair discrimination against people who aren't clever enough to write in hexadecimal or mnemonics (whatever they are) is as follows. Computers work in binary, and the closer your input is to binary, the less work the machine has to do converting it into something it understands and can use. This means that the actual operations can take place sooner, and hence appear to be faster. Clear? Never mind. Now when the likes of you or I key in a BASIC program, and then type RUN, the PET starts looking at the program line by line, and interpreting each and every statement into machine code as it goes along. This process is rather slow by computing standards, and can give rise to horrors

after it, except by altering the original Source File and re-compiling it to produce a new Object File. Well, you can't have your cake and eat it!

Compatibility

There are six main areas of importance in compilers that I can think of. Firstly, accurate conversion and compatibility with the interpretive BASIC – fairly obvious, but I've heard many hair-raising tales regarding compilers that actually introduce errors (as if we didn't put enough in ourselves!). It also helps if you don't have to spend hours re-writing the program you wanted to compile just to suit the compiler.

Secondly, good error reporting – if you have made a mistake, it certainly helps if the compiler can at least equal the PET's interpreter in terms of reporting the fact to you (e.g. ?SYNTAX ERROR).

Thirdly, speed of operation of the compiled program – most people will compile to achieve greater speed (although others may require non-listable programs, for instance).

Fourthly, speed of compilation – it's not much good if you have a thousand line program and the compiler runs at 3 lines an hour is it? One of my earlier incarnations was at a famous U.K. airport, where I worked on reservation systems (nothing to do with Indians) on minicomputers. We cut out one of those anti-smoking Government Health Warning adverts from the paper (with a skeleton hold-

others don't. This tends to be offset against the compatibility of the compiler with the original PET BASIC, though.

Well, back to the plot. We looked at three of the main contenders for the compiled PET market – Petspeed, DLT BASIC and PC-BASIC (which has nothing to do with another micro publication!). Oxford Computers, who market Petspeed, also produce an Integer Compiler (one that is fairly different from PET BASIC), but time and typing skills obviated an in-depth look at it. We used an 8096 computer (to get maximum effect from testing large programs) and an 8050 disk unit, although I believe versions of all these exist for most PETs capable of using a disk unit.

PC-BASIC

PC-BASIC uses a security ROM to prevent pirating which, rather unfortunately for us, uses the same slot as the WordPro ROM. However, a Philips screwdriver and my Apple (!) chip removing tool soon took care of that. It is necessary to buy extra copies of this chip (at £25 each), if you want the compiled program to run on another machine. Once the compiler has been loaded, the program disk may be removed and replaced with the diskette containing the program to be compiled. You are then invited to enter the source filename, object filename and printer type. Once all three options have been entered everything else happens automatically and you can go and make the tea (assuming that

it's a long program). The current pass and line number are displayed as the compilation takes place. If you have a printer connected, an error report is printed, followed by the program size, the variable size and the total size in bytes. The program was very simple to use, although when typing in the file names it was all too easy to use cursor left and cursor right, which produced the "quotes mode" graphics rather than moving the cursor, which was rather annoying.

The version of PC-BASIC we had for review couldn't use the extra memory of the 96k machine, and was not compatible with System 96 (see below). There are a number of extra statements which may be included in the source program, but these fall outside of

disk in drive one then the last filenames used will be displayed, and may be accepted by one keystroke. Again the program was very simple to use, and the compilation was entirely automatic, with the pass number and current line number being displayed at the top left of the screen. Several extra statements are allowed for the more advanced programmer. The manual was clearly written, but lacked an index.

Petspeed

Petspeed was the simplest of all to operate. All you have to do after loading the program is enter the source program name. It apparently used as much memory as it wanted, and compiled *Adventure* ran happily on the

We used five different programs to test the compilers for accuracy, speed of compilation, size of object file and speed of execution.

Program 1 – Commodore's Disk Performance Test (mainly disk I/O)

Program 2 – Adventure (Jim Butterfield version)

BOCHARGING Your PROGRAMS

the scope of this article. I have tabulated all the speed tests, file sizes and so on, so all that remains to be said here is that the manual was very comprehensive and easy to follow, and actually contained a detailed index (very unusual for micro software!)

DTL BASIC

DTL BASIC, from Dataview, can run under System 96 (also from Dataview), which allows the source and object to use the 96k PET to full advantage. Anti-rip-off is provided by means of a key-ring dongle, which plugs onto the cassette port. In order to use the compiler with System 96, it is necessary to fit one dongle, load and run System 96, remove the first dongle and fit the compiler dongle and then load and run the compiler. This can become rather frustrating after a few runs, but may not be a problem assuming that this is only performed once a day. A third dongle, labelled RUN TIME is also provided, which if fitted to the second (internal) cassette port, will allow programs compiled on the compiling machine to run on any other PET fitted with this run time dongle inside. These can be purchased separately as with the PC-BASIC chip.

On start-up, you are invited to enter the name of the source and object files, followed by three questions relating to printing, which result in a full source listing, error reports and size of the compiled program and variables. If a run has been performed before on the

8096 without any special software. The object file has the same names as the source with a (witty) suffix of "gt". Unfortunately for those who would like an automatic listing, the program does not have any print options during compilation, although a Report program is provided which can be run to produce a list of all variable names and their locations, together with a system memory map of the object. Copyright protection is achieved with one of the new stackable dongles on the cassette port, but unlike its competitors, the compiled program can be run on any suitable PET without any form of extra device (which has tremendous advantages for programmers wishing to speed up their own products without installing dongles or chips on their clients' machines).

Petspeed produces "Speedcode" which is a pseudo-code, rather than straight 6502 machine code. The Speedcode interpreter is attached to the object automatically at compilation time, and is transparent to the user. Whilst this means that there is always an overhead of 32 blocks on each object file, the speed of execution seems to be greatly enhanced. The manual was very brief, but gave all the necessary information to use the program effectively and rather appealed to my simple nature! No index was included, but with only twelve pages it was hardly necessary. The excellent execution speed and "dongle-less" object files made Petspeed my personal favourite.

Our thanks to Porsche Cars Great Britain Ltd. for supplying the photograph of a Porsche 911 Turbo.

Program 3 – Simple print to the screen program:-

```

5  TI$="000000"
10  FOR I = 1 TO 10
20  FOR J = 1 TO 2000
30  PRINT CHR$(I+64);
40  NEXT J
50  NEXT I
60  PRINT TI$
70  END

```


PET/PEED

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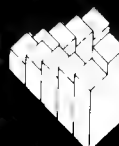
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Note that zero is a special case, represented by 5 zeros. Let us analyse the number 1 to see how the floating point number is formed. First we look at the characteristic, 81. Remember that we are using excess-128 (that is 80 in hex), so 81 refers to 2 to the power one. The most significant bit is always a one (even though it is replaced with a zero for positive numbers – I warned you it was mind bending!).

We are now going to shift the fractional part left one place; left because the number is positive, one place because the characteristic is one over the 80. What 'falls off' the left will be our number. Just looking at the top byte, because all the others are zero we get:

BEFORE SHIFT		AFTER SHIFT
10000000	1	00000000

Hey presto! We have a 1. Let us try it with 3. This time we have to shift left twice, because the characteristic is 82. The top byte of the fractional part is 40, which is really C0 because the top bit is always set:

BEFORE SHIFT		AFTER SHIFT
11000000	11	00000000

Praise be, it works! Try it with the other numbers until you get the hang of it. Incidentally, whole books have been written about the pitfalls of writing floating point routines – there are many pitfalls for the unwary. Fortunately, most of us are able to keep clear of them.

Oops, I almost forgot, you asked about fixed point as well. Fixed point is where you convert all inputs to integers for calculation, then convert back to output the results. For example, if a program accepts a money value such as £100.00, the program multiplies by 100 to get 10000 (pence), which is used to calculate, say the VAT: 1500, which is divided by 100 to get the output value 15.00. Many high level languages such as FORTRAN and COBOL handle this 'scaling' of input and output automatically, and integer arithmetic routines are much simpler than floating point!

P.S. This must be the longest 'tip' I have ever produced! I'm glad I get paid by the word!.

New printer words

Dear Tommy,

I have been looking around for a new printer, and found that printer manufacturers are using lots of new words unknown when I bought my reconditioned golfball. Most of these are fairly obvious but can you explain 'logic seeking' and 'proportional spacing'?

B. R. Brace

I must say I sometimes get a little taken aback myself at some of the features you can get in remarkably cheap printers these days. I can remember several years back you could pay well into four figures for a printer which could only print upper case, had none of these fancy features and staggered along at just over 100 cps, but enough of my meanderings!

Logic seeking applies to bidirectional printers, that is, those which print both while the head is going left to right and when it is on its way back. On a non-logic seeking printer, the head always traverses the full width of the paper, regardless of how much or how little is to be printed on the next line. If a printer has logic seeking, when the printer has finished one line, the head will stop until the next line comes in from the computer, then it will decide whether

it has to move left or right, and by how much, to get to the start of the next line. In this way a lot of unnecessary head travel is got rid of.

Proportional spacing makes the printer output look less like a typewriter and more like printed text, such as *MicroComputer Printout*. Another name for it is 'even white space' printing, which makes it a bit clearer. What it means is that if you print two narrow letters such as "i" together, the printer will squash them together to close up the gap, and if you print two wide characters such as "M", the printer will space them apart so they do not run into each other. The idea is to keep the amount of white space in between the characters more even. This does mean that you cannot tell how long a line is going to be, because every character is not now 0.1 inch from its neighbour. Most dedicated word processors can cope with this, (though few micro packages can) but the only other real use is for 'fixed format' printing, say of a standard letter, where you can experiment with your text to find out how many words fit onto each line.

Sinclair round up

Dear Tommy,

I have a Sinclair ZX81, and I have a programming problem I would like you to solve. How can I round a number to 2 decimal places, as in pounds and pence? Is it possible to have a general rounding routine to round to any number of decimal places?

M. Peters

This is a very common requirement, so this routine should be of interest to many of our readers:

```
1000 LET Z = Z * 100
1010 LET Z = Z + 0.5
1020 LET Z = INT (Z/100)
1030 RETURN
```

This rounds to 2 decimal places. Three can be achieved by changing the factor 100 to 1000 etc.

6502 Instructions

Dear Tommy,

Could I please have a complete list of the 6502 instruction set with both the Assembly language mnemonics and the equivalent Hex codes. Could I also have a simple description of what each instruction does. Oh!! I almost forgot, would you happen to know where user memory begins and ends on the unexpanded VIC-20 and where the routine for the PRINT statement is located.

K. Wells

Apart from his two queries Mr Wells eulogised at great length about the magazine in general and this column in particular. Take note: how to get your letters printed in this column! I can resist everything except flattery (*and beer and beer and more beer* – Ed). If you are interested in learning 6502 assembler, can I recommend the book by Lance Levanthal? A complete list of 6502 instructions is really beyond the scope of this column, and anyway, we ran an article on assembler quite recently (July – Dec 1981).

User RAM on the basic VIC runs from 4096 (hex 1000) to 7680 (hex 1E00). The PRINT statement actually starts at \$CA9A, but the two most useful entry points are \$CB1E and \$CB25. \$CB1E prints a string addressed by the AC (LSB) and YR (MSB) which ends in a byte containing zero. \$CB25 prints a string pointed to by locations \$22 and \$23 whose length is given by the value in the XR. In both cases the string should be less than 256 characters long.



WHICH BUSINESS SYSTEM?

Last issue we commenced our series of record-cards giving the low-down on several popular computer models. We continue this month with a look at five more typical installations.

We stress, as before, that if you are considering purchasing your first microcomputer system, it is very important to study the software first. Make sure that there is a package available that will provide the functions you require, and is operated in a fashion you can understand. Secondly, you should check up on your supplier – can he provide satisfactory after-sales support both in the form of hardware servicing, and software advice over the telephone.

Nevertheless, we feel that it is very useful to have a good idea of the pros, cons and background to most of the popular hardware on the market. Not only in case you still end up with a choice of machines, but also to help you decide on which vendors to try out first.

These handy system record cards are designed to help you check out what the hardware salesman tell you – and make your system choice from an informed position.

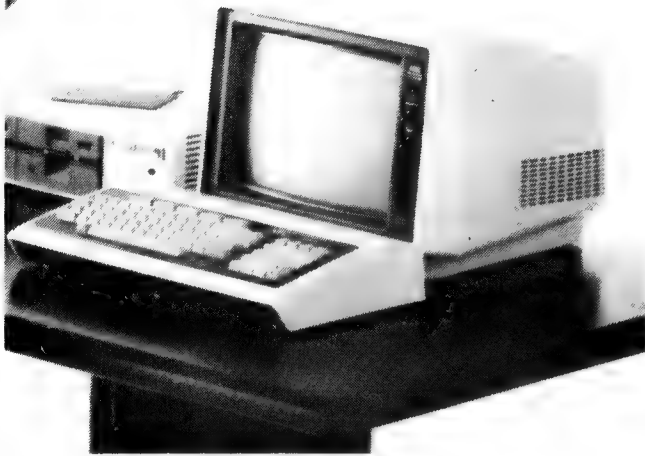
Listed on each card you will see some brief specifications and an approximate retail price. This includes keyboard, screen, disks and any requisite interfaces – but not a printer. Though several of the suppliers recommended the manufacturer's unit to go with a system, we found that each could operate a wide range of branded printers, though sometimes an additional interface costing £100 or so was needed.

The price also included operating system software, and in some cases, more than one programming language. You should allow extra for applications packages, however.

You will also find sections for Advantages, Disadvantages and our Comments – perhaps the most useful data of all. In a couple of sentences we have tried to sum up what we know of each machine, based on inside industry knowledge, reader's letters and our own technical evaluations.

Finally, there is a typical user. This should not be taken as the only type of user, but rather as an example application which makes best use of the machine's features.

NEC PC-8000



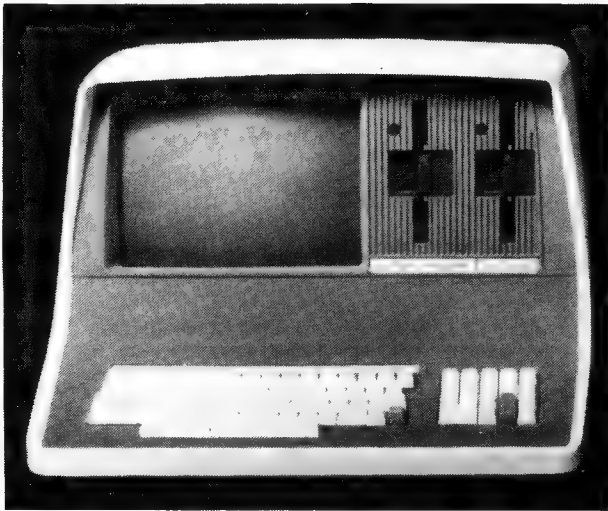
PROCESSOR:	μPD780C-1 (Z80 compatible)
RAM:	32K
SCREEN:	8 colour, high resolution, up to 80 characters wide.
KEYBOARD:	Numeric Keypad, Programmable Function keys
LANGUAGE/O.S.:	N-BASIC in ROM, CP/M
DISK CAPACITY:	280K
PRICE:	£1900

ADVANTAGES: Complete system from screen to printer, with various expansion facilities can be purchased from one supplier. Neat design. Keyboard console has BASIC in ROM and colour facilities without recourse to plug-in enhancements. This is in keeping with Japanese reputation for reliability.

DISADVANTAGES: Though the UK distributors (IBR) are actively developing and buying software, relatively few of the CP/M packages make good use of high resolution colour and programmable function keys.

COMMENTS: The NEC is perhaps the only Japanese colour micro which is being actively marketed and supported with software in this country. Costs can be saved by buying a monochrome or low-res colour monitor and upgrading it later.

TYPICAL USER: Business where computed results are to be presented to clients – or in a design office where colour is mandatory.



SUPERBRAIN

PROCESSOR:	Z-80
RAM:	64K
SCREEN:	80 x 25
KEYBOARD:	Numeric keypad. Programmable function keys
LANGUAGE/O.S.:	CP/M
DISK CAPACITY:	320K
PRICE:	£2000

ADVANTAGES: All-in-one integrated design. Good keyboard. Good value for money. Most types of application package available.

DISADVANTAGES: Not much software written specifically for this machine. Physical construction could be better designed.

COMMENTS: A very popular machine for running CP/M packages without expensive hardware. Consequently it is widely sold for running Wordstar, along with a suitable daisywheel printer.

TYPICAL USER: Small business wanting good word processing on a budget.



ACT SIRIUS I

PROCESSOR:	Intel 8088, 16 bit
RAM:	128K
SCREEN:	Variety of configurations up to 132 characters wide.
KEYBOARD:	Numeric keypad. Programmable keys. Keys for volume and screen brightness.
LANGUAGE/O.S.:	CP/M and MSDOS (used on IBM Personal Computer).
DISK CAPACITY:	1.2MBytes
PRICE:	£2400

ADVANTAGES: Superb ergonomic design with detachable low-profile keyboard and adjustable non-glare screen. Compatibility with IBM hardware good for future software. 16-bits means high speed. High-speed communications ports will ultimately permit networking.

DISADVANTAGES: New machine and processor means a current lack of software written specifically to take advantage of this machine's special features.

COMMENTS: Very definitely a major step forward in microcomputer hardware – designed by Chuck Peddle (father of the 6502 and Commodore PET). The whole machine is 'soft' in design so that character fonts, display size, operating system and programming language can be altered and stored on disk.

TYPICAL USER: Modern office requiring up-to-date design and versatile display for management accounts, etc.



COMMODORE 8000

PROCESSOR:	6502
RAM:	32K
SCREEN:	80 x 25
KEYBOARD:	Separate numeric keypad
LANGUAGE/O.S.:	BASIC in ROM
DISK CAPACITY:	1.0 MBytes
PRICE:	£1800

ADVANTAGES: Good disk capacity. Clear screen. Lots of well tried software from Commodore Approved dealers. Large installed user base.

DISADVANTAGES: Physical design rather outdated and clumsy. Won't run CP/M programs except with £500 peripheral. ROM-based programming language inflexible.

COMMENTS: The 8000 series is the business version of in the PET range, and though it will soon be getting a bit long in the tooth, it still represents excellent value-for-money.

TYPICAL USER: Company with large database of records, or requiring specialist packages, e.g. Estate Agents, Doctors, etc.



HEWLETT PACKARD HP125

PROCESSOR:	Z80
RAM:	64K
SCREEN:	80 columns – high definition characters
KEYBOARD:	Detachable. Numeric keypad, Function keys
LANGUAGE/O.S.:	CP/M
DISK CAPACITY:	512K
PRICE:	£3600

ADVANTAGES: Superb ergonomic design both with the high-definition screen and 'friendly' keyboard – the bottom line of the screen indicates what the function keys are for.

DISADVANTAGES: High price (HP sales policy does not permit discounting). Relatively limited number of dealers means that software packages developed are likely to be only of a specialist nature.

COMMENTS: Really a Rolls Royce machine – the HP125 marks Hewlett Packard's entry into the small business market. It is supported by a limited range of very high quality software – including VisiCalc 125, Word 125, BASIC 125, Graphics 125 and Link 125 (for communications).

TYPICAL USER: Company requiring best in reliability and user friendliness, good communications facilities, or ability to drive printers, plotters and laboratory equipment.

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Doctors



Can Computers ease The Strain?

Are microcomputers being actively used to assist the doctor in making diagnoses, or can they really only help in the administration side of his practice? **Martin Hayman** took a trip to the surgery....

Medicine was one of the first professions to be touched with enthusiasm for computing. In the early 1960s, when the future potential of artificial intelligence systems started to be bruited abroad, it was predicted that doctors would become obsolete, to be replaced by super-clever, rule-based diagnostic computer systems. Such systems would "learn" from experience and synthesise the expertise of many doctors to yield diagnoses which, based as they would be on a much larger corpus of information than any one human being can access in short-term memory, would be more accurate and reliable than a human's. The diagnostic, or intellectual as opposed to manipulative (surgery, physiotherapy) side of medicine would become a highly automated procedure.

Wild predictions

These wild predictions are not only in

practice way wide of the mark; they have actually set back the cause of the computer in medicine, alienating doctors and patients on the one hand, and raising hopes unrealistically high on the other. At least, so says Dr Tim de Dombal, a surgeon at St. James Hospital, Leeds, who has researched computer aids for medical diagnosis since 1969 and has one of the few proven systems currently in use. Says de Dombal: "The computer was set on in the early 1960s to replace doctors, and in my view enormous harm was done to the field of computers in diagnosis."

Now there is a far greater awareness on the part of the public about what computers can and cannot do. This is largely courtesy of the micro, which has given many more people access to the machine and hence some understanding of its operation. Their expectations of computing have been scaled down and there is less paranoia



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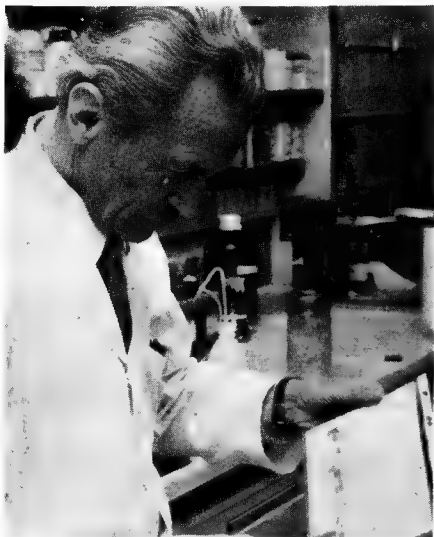


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about computers "taking over". Many will have experienced computers in a small business environment, and this is the area where the majority of "medical" systems running on micros are to be found. After all, a general practice is not so different from any other kind of small business which offers a service – in terms of software writing. The principal difference which we shall come to later, lies in the general practitioner's desire to make full notes, in a fashion which is difficult to reduce or "tokenise", thus requiring copious storage. This leads to the argument that very little medical computing can be done on a micro, because it is neither reliable nor fast enough.

Diagnostic machine

The more interesting application of computing in medicine, and that which characterises computing for doctors rather than any other profession, is nevertheless in the diagnostic field. De Dombal has probably the most effective computerised aid for diagnostic decision-making available today and has demonstrated that a surprising amount can be achieved with relatively little outlay. Note that it is not a diagnostic machine, but an aid. De Dombal is very strict on this point: "None of us here in Leeds thinks that the day has come when the computer can make diagnoses," he warns. "I don't see it happening in my working lifetime (20 years) and I hope it won't." A computer, as all the elementary text books on computing emphasise, can only go to work on strictly defined quantities. There are many ways in which a doctor can establish that a patient's health is not all it should be, many of them unquantifiable. "The only things you can feed into a computer are symptoms or signs," he says. "But if you see a child and say to yourself, 'My goodness, he doesn't look well today', there's no way you can feed that into a computer."

De Dombal prefers to see his system as an aid in the same way as an X-ray

machine, an electrocardiograph or as a Coulter counter for analysis of blood samples. Each or any of these mechanical aids may be used in arriving at a diagnosis, though none of them actually signals a course of action. "A doctor can look at any X-ray and say, 'I don't believe it'. Without interpretation it can be quite wrong." How often was his diagnosis aid "quite wrong", I asked. He told me that the diagnostic accuracy of his system was 70-90% compared with the usual SHO diagnosis rate of 50-60% in this particular field (abdominal pain). These figures are impressively backed up by over 20,000 case studies from Leeds, Bangour in West Lothian and places as far afield as Mexico and Australia. All report on average a 20% improvement in initial diagnosis of abdominal pain.

Aide-memoire

How is it done? The answer lies in careful evaluation of the task in hand – again standard text-book stuff. In this case, de Dombal started his work more than ten years ago after a full three years spent evaluating the decision-making process in diagnosis. It starts by making prior assumptions on the likelihood of certain symptoms leading to certain diagnoses. Severe lower abdominal pain, for example, may well be porphyria, as suffered by George IV; on the other hand it is far likelier to be appendicitis. The first move, then, is to assign a probability to the possible diagnoses of particular symptoms. As examination proceeds, the possibilities are modified to take account of observed symptoms, ending up with the posterior probabilities. As the computer is programmed, it will effectively give a checklist of symptoms to check for – functioning also as an on-line "aide-memoire". For this reason it is also a very useful learning tool for students: if they overlook to explore a certain possibility, either through forgetfulness or lack of experience, it will prompt them to go back and check for that symptom.

It all sounds blissfully simple; intriguingly, its principles are based on Bayes' theorem. Bayes was an eighteenth century English clergyman who used this mathematical model to prove the existence of God through observation of external phenomena; his theorem was found on his desk after his death and published in 1753. "It's a shame it's not based on more up-to-date mathematics, but as it happens Bayes' theorem proves rather a good model for medical diagnosis." Reduced to medical terms, a great deal of data on the occurrence of abdominal pain (derived from the World Organisation of Gastroenterology's Research Committee) is used to weight the probabilities in the program's model; if you have severe lower abdominal pain, there is a 24% chance that you do have appendicitis.

The computer holds a large matrix of existing cases which are not, however, stored in an attributable form, thereby overcoming one of the principal objections to computers in medicine, that it is easy to correlate medical data with certain other kinds of computerised records – to the

disadvantage of the subject. "If you, as a miscreant, try to come along and see if someone who is known to you is suffering from some unmentionable disease, you won't be able to." Though de Dombal has concentrated on abdominal pain, other hospitals have extended his work into the areas of jaundice and coma: conditions which some patients might prefer a prospective employer, say, not to know about.

De Dombal uses a PET, although the system is adapted to run on an Apple or a Wang 2200. When he first started computerising, he had the use of 1K on a Wang 770c. Consequently, his system is extremely economical: the Basic program, yielding a bar-chart read-out of diagnostic probabilities, plus the data module being worked on, is contained in a print-out as short (or as long, if you prefer) as your arm. This seems to be the case whether the program prompts are in English or any other of the languages in which the Leeds system is available: French, Flemish, Dutch, Danish, Spanish, Norwegian, or Thai. The system has 32K, with a further 154K overlaid in the form of data disks. Its compactness and simplicity prompted the British Medical Association's micro mastermind, Dr. John Dawson, to describe it as "one of the most elegant uses of the micro I have ever seen." What was the secret of its elegance? "It's elegant because it's simple; and if you know a lot of medicine, you'll know a student's priorities – the way his mind works when making a diagnosis."

Disaster area

By contrast, Dr. Mike Sheldon, who researches into expert systems for general practice at Nottingham University, would advise the GP to steer clear of micro-based systems. "I can take you to 12 practices which have bought small computers and they're all cursing the day that they ever heard of them. It's a disaster area." The needs of the GP, says Dr. Sheldon, are very similar to those of a small business. He needs to keep an age/sex register of his patients, with recall dates; he needs to be able to print out prescriptions and to handle his own accounts; and he needs to keep full clinical records of each patient. This last requirement is particularly consumptive of memory; Sheldon's prescription is a fixed Winchester at the least, preferably with another, removable disk. This is partly because of his views on the structure of medicine in the UK. He believes that the GP's surgery is the place where the majority of illnesses should be treated. GPs, he says, are an under-used resource; and that far too many patients are referred to consultants, with their long waiting lists. His aim is to provide the necessary tools in the GP's surgery to allow the vast majority of treatment to be done on the spot. Surely, I asked him, the GP generally sees people with minor complaints and hence is unlikely to need access to large-scale clinical databases through his own communications link?

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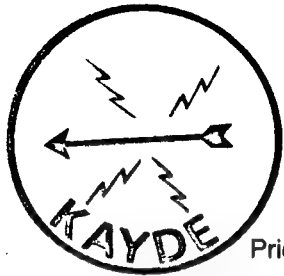
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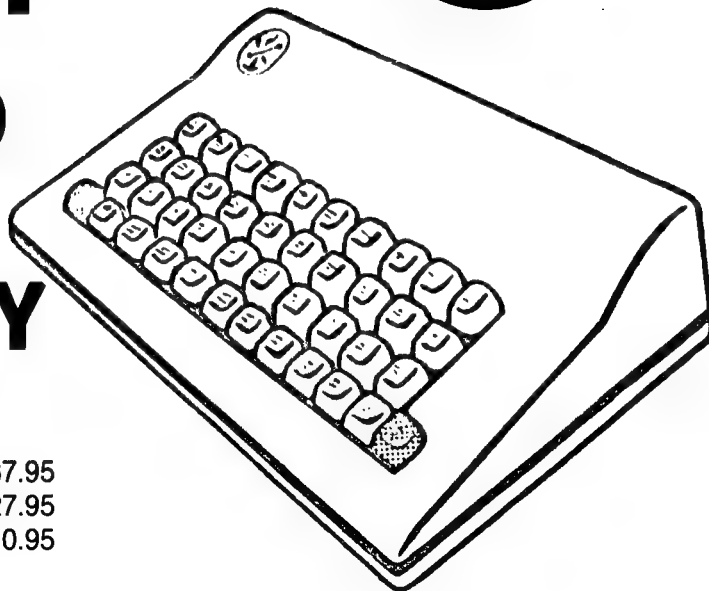


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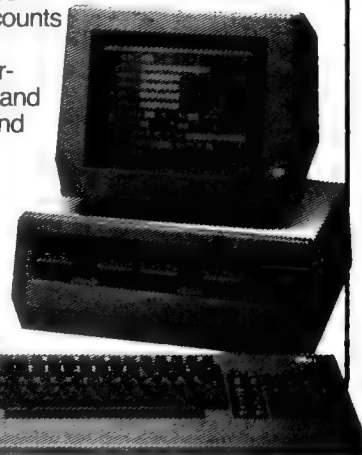
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INSIDE TRADER

I see that Commodore's UK Commandant, butch, Range-Rover driving Big Bob Gleadow, is making steady progress with his fiendish plan to gain control of the rest of the organisation. The company's international arm (C.E.L.) has just been removed, kicking and screaming from its luxurious Swiss headquarters to Leigh Road, Slough. Commodore UK recently vacated said offices on the grounds that they were unfit for human habitation.

Apple high command have emerged from their bunker after an extraordinary three day autopsy on the Apple III. The inquest verdict was 'premature introduction'. The new Apple IV, code-named LISA will therefore be introduced S-L-O-W-L-Y. This may be just as well as the Chief Engineer on the LISA project has defected to an outfit called Grid.

I predict an entertainingly acrimonious barney between Personal Software Inc., now pompously renamed VisiCorp, and their UK distributors, ACT Microsoft. Both companies are secretly plotting to get out of the contract; VisiCorp so it can take over the juicy European market itself; ACT to concentrate on more profitable IBM/Sirius and CP/M software. My friends in the legal profession are looking forward to some profitable litigation.

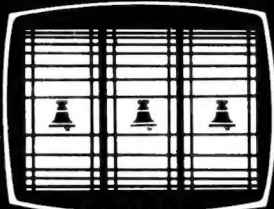
Floppy disk manufacturers should be quaking in their boots as word gets out of Bart Khan and his amazing cube. Mr Khan, who is chairman of a company called MicroXeno, says the six-inch cube will store at least 9.9 gigabytes (that's 9,900 million bytes) of data. For some reason no-one seems prepared to lend Mr Khan the money to manufacture the ineffable cube. MicroXeno recently advertised itself as "rapidly becoming the world's largest network of consultants...in computer technology." The company had five employees at the time.

Latest manufacturer to receive the sincerest form of flattery is Apple: some Taiwanese rotter is busy churning out counterfeit Apple IIs by the dozen. The only immediate way of telling the Chinese copy from the real McWozniak is to look for the 'Made in USA tag'. If it ain't there you've got yourself a Chang Kai Chek special.

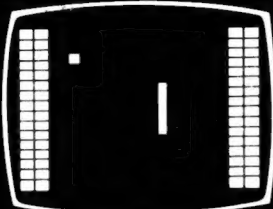
'Colonel' Bruce Page's economic theories were a legend even at the New Statesman, whence he recently departed the Editorship, not entirely of his own volition. Now the Colonel is tinkering with a computer model of the economy running on his £69 Sinclair ZX81. Seeing as how the Treasury's model of the economy keeps a multi-million pound Univac mainframe busy, I am not optimistic about the Colonel's chances.

People Who Live in Glass Houses dept: My congratulations to Mr R. Sangster on his appointment as Tandy's Official Complainer-in-Chief and Literary Critic Extraordinaire. First to suffer Mr Sangster's wrath were ACT, who received a letter threatening dire retribution if a long list of complaints about the Sirius 1 brochure was not immediately rectified. The effect of this was somewhat dissipated by the non-enclosure of the list. I earnestly entreat those with a grudge against Tandy not to inundate Mr Sangster with erroneous excerpts from TRS-80 literature. His address is Tandy Corporation, Tame Way Tower, Bridge Street, Walsall WS7 7LA.

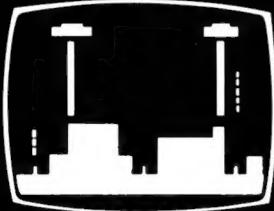
Stop Press: Latest to receive one of Mr Sangster's mournful missives is none other than our Editor. I understand Mr Sangster is anxious to receive the sort of chain letters that bring all manner of disaster upon those unwise enough to break the chain.



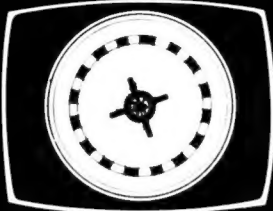
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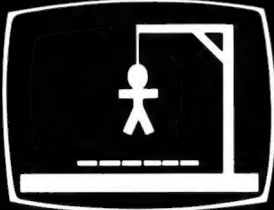
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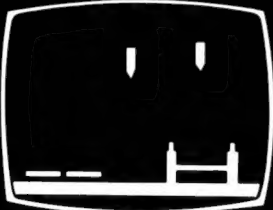
3. BLOCKADE:



4. ROULETTE:



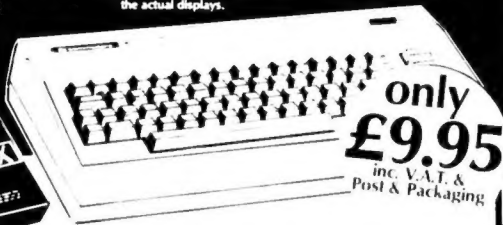
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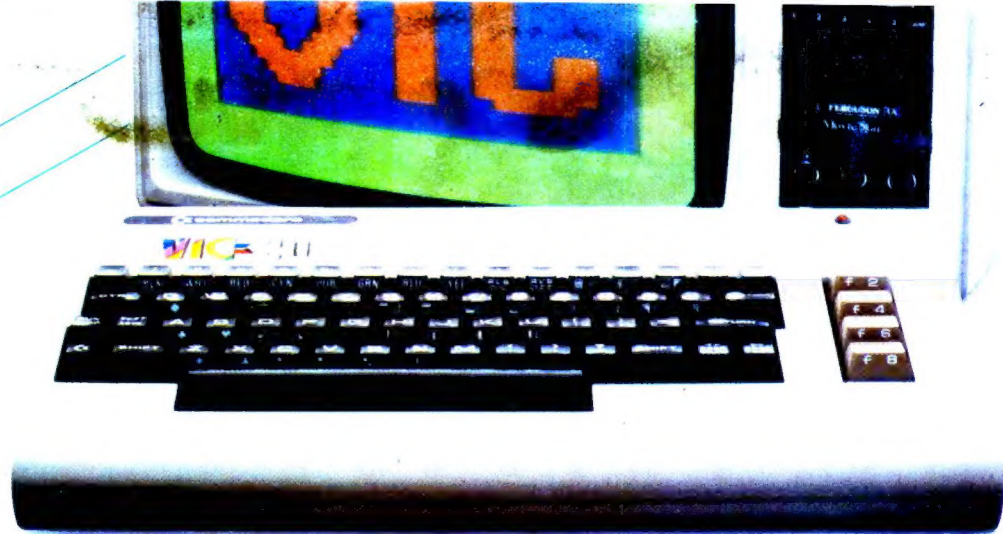
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?DIVISION BY ZERO ERROR IN 500
READY.
HELP
500 J = SQR(A*B/C)
```

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